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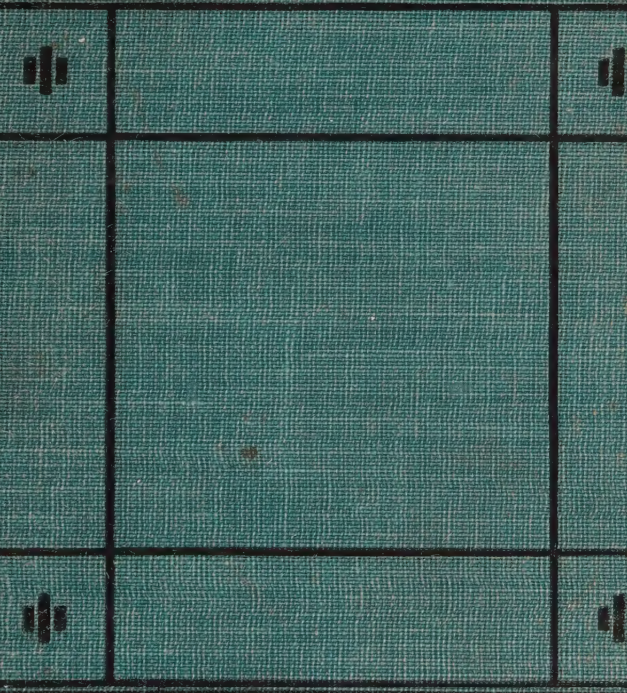

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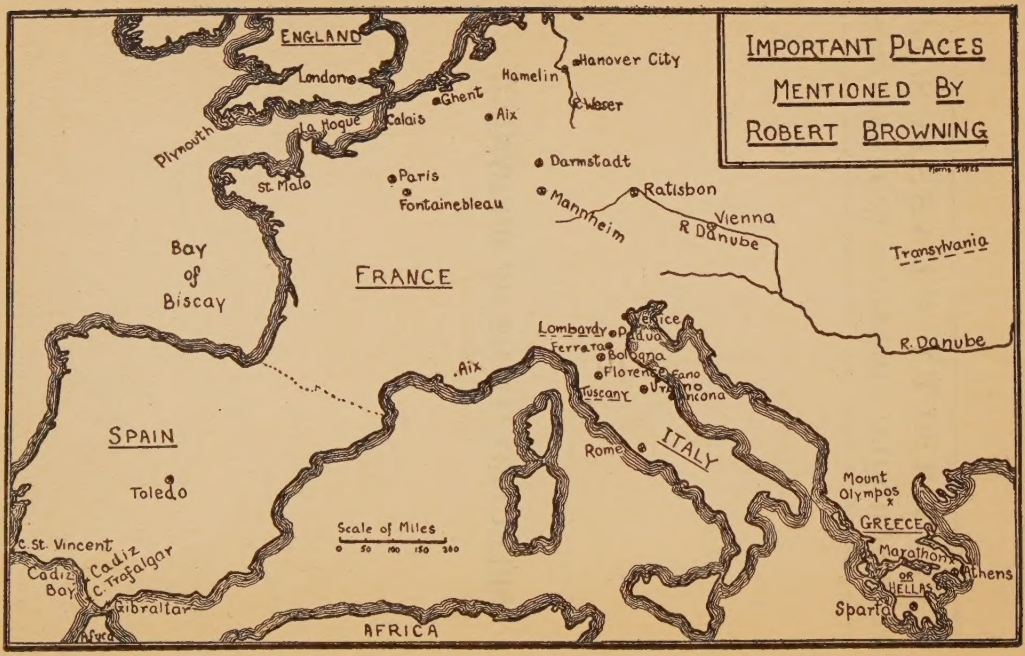
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La Hogue
Calais
Ghent
Aix
Hamelin
Hanover City
R. Weser
Darmstadt
Ratisbon
Vienna
R. Danube
Transylvania
R. Danube
St. Malo
Paris
Fontainebleau
Mannheim
Bay
of
Biscay
FRANCE
Aix
Lombardy
Venice
Padua
Ferrara
Bologna
Florence
Pesaro
Urbino
Ancona
Tuscany
Rome
ITALY
SPAIN
Toledo
Scale of Miles
0 50 100 150 200
C. St. Vincent
Cadiz Bay
Cadiz
C. Trafalgar
Gibraltar
Africa
AFRICA
Mount Olympos
GREECE
Marathon
Athens
HELLAS
Sparta

SELECTED POEMS OF BROWNING

WITH INTRODUCTIONS, CRITICAL COMMENTS
EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUESTIONS
FOR CLASS STUDY

EDITED BY

JOSEPH PAXTON SIMMONS

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, BAYLOR UNIVERSITY,
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INTRODUCTION

How to Enjoy Browning

Browning's poems are enjoyed by those who read them carefully. Some poems may have to be read over and over again, but each reading brings new discoveries and increased satisfaction. "I don't like poems, I can't understand them at first reading" is a common declaration of unthinking persons. The fact is, we like best the poems that grow upon us at each reading, just as we like good music better each time we hear it, or just as we like best those friends who "wear well," or grow more and more enjoyable as we come to know them better.

POEMS WEAR WELL

Browning's poems, like great pictures, good music, or true friends, "wear well." They reward us richly for our careful reading and study. They contain many interesting stories, entertaining studies of human nature, and some of the world's biggest and best thoughts. After one knows something of Browning's life, his poems become intensely interesting as noble expressions of the poet's experiences and lofty visions. At the outset, the simple background, or setting, of each poem should be understood. With the reading of the poem, difficult passages should become clear. Then careful re-readings with a study of the suggestive questions will

guide the reader straight towards the central truth which he will enjoy discovering for himself.

In such an interesting, well planned program of study and appreciation, the study of Browning's poems becomes a real pleasure and brings to the reader the richest of rewards. When one discovers for himself how simply, how directly, and how faithfully Browning reveals leading types of human nature and interprets the big human emotions, he feels the full force of the power and charm of companionship with a great poet, an exquisite artist, and a fascinating thinker and philosopher.

Browning's Poetry and Ideals

When properly read, Browning's poems offer lasting satisfaction. Moreover, they are no more difficult to understand and to appreciate than are the standard works of other first-rate poets. Once one becomes used to his style and manner of telling the story, he finds Browning relatively easy, always entertaining, and profitable beyond ordinary expectations.

FINE, UNUSUAL STYLE

The reader of Browning's poems should constantly bear in mind two things. First, the poet has an abrupt, hearty fashion of rushing up when he has a story to tell and grabbing you by the lapel and, without further ado, plunging into his tale. The "who," the "what," the "why," the "where," the "when," that you may want to know at once, he gets to in his own good time. If we only listen patiently instead of impatiently wonder-

ing why he does not do things as we are accustomed to having them done for us, we shall see that he tells a fine story in a splendid way.

Second, Browning does, oftentimes, take enormous liberties with his sentences. Sometimes, they seem to come thumping forth, all but mutilated beyond recognition and understanding. But careful reading enables one to discover the real charm of so spontaneous and genuine a style of expression. Much of the time, however, he is entirely conventional. It is only when he seems to get in an enormous hurry, or gets so laden with the burden of his message that his bubbling, outpouring energy makes him impatient of the conjoining parts of speech or of the normal arrangement of words. Sometimes, his big thoughts and effective expression of them, demand great condensation and a rugged style. Always his style is in keeping with the thought and theme, simple, direct, dynamic, and always carrying a sense of finality and satisfaction.

A Beautiful Philosophy

Browning has a "message" that is a vigorous, virile message for everyday people. The chief points of this message may be briefly summarized here so that you may be on the lookout for them. He believed:

1. That the salvation and growth of the soul comes from opposition; that hurts and injuries, rebuffs and disappointments are mere challenges to life to spend and use its best powers in overcoming them; that the "dance of circumstance" around man's soul is but to test and prove it.

2. That activity is the law of growth, both in this life and in the life hereafter; that life is well worth living and living intensely.

3. That man has arrived at a certain stage of perfection, but that he is still unfinished, and that the process of evolution which has brought him thus far on the road is transferred from the body to the soul.

4. That the purpose of life is to develop powers that sleep in the germ, and that man contains within him the germs of divinity.

5. That we come to truth only through crises of great emotion; and that beauty has a positive worth for the soul. He did not believe merely that "Beauty is Truth, and Truth Beauty."

6. That love is a duty; that power and love go together; and the destinies of humanity are everywhere presided over by a God of justice and love.

Browning's Life and Writings

Browning was, in a large measure, the product of the fine background from which he sprang. His father was a man of much ability and charm, who held a clerkship in the Bank of England. He was something of an artist and something also of a poet after the manner of Alexander Pope. He was a student of the classics and was interested in odd and out-of-the-way information, to which end he had built up a library containing six thousand volumes. He married a woman whom Carlyle called "the true type of Scottish gentlewoman," the daughter of a Dundee ship-owner who had come

from Germany. She was a very devout woman, very charming in her manner, and of an artistic nature.

BROWNING'S EARLY LIFE

Into the home of this delightful couple in Camberwell, a London suburb, there was born on May 7, 1812, Robert Browning. The usual stories of his energy, restlessness, and lively temper as a child are told of him. When he was five years old, he was different from most boys of that age in that he was composing acceptable poetry even before he could write. In the most exact sense, he may be said to have been born a poet.

HIS EDUCATION

Browning's education was incomplete so far as schools were concerned. When he was ten years old he attended a private school for some time and then had a tutor at home. Under the direction of his father, however, he acquired a learning through wide and desultory reading. Later, he matriculated at the University of London, where he studied for a period of two years. Italy, he said later in life, was his university. In addition, he became a thoroughly trained musician, which was an accomplishment invaluable in his later work as a poet.

THE INFLUENCE OF BYRON

During Browning's earlier years, Byron was at the height of his popularity. This fact probably accounted for the Byronic turn that was manifest in Browning's earliest efforts at composition. Before he was six, he was imitating Byron's poetry and making sketches.

Of course, these very childish efforts amounted to nothing and have not been preserved. But they indicated to his parents the turn of his mind, and gave them, since they were inclined to let him have his way, an opportunity to encourage him.

INFLUENCE OF SHELLEY THE "SUN-TREADER"

At the age of fourteen, he discovered Shelley's *Queen Mab* in a bookshop and thus came under the influence of that poet of freedom and ideal beauty. His mother helped him to purchase a complete edition of Shelley's poems. The boy devoured every word. His spirit was already fertile ground for such seed, being prepared by nature, by training, and by Byron. Shelley became for him the "Sun-Treader," his inspiration, and the lode-star of his ambitions.

Under Shelley's influence, he had, by the age of twenty, written and published his first poem, *Pauline*. It was published at his father's expense. It attracted little attention, for it was long, confused, and exaggerated. But with all its faults, what a poem to come from the pen of a mere boy!

In January, 1833, after the publication of *Pauline*, Browning visited Petrograd, but the visit did not bear fruit save in a couple of poems in his later years. He became interested in the diplomatic service, and after his return to London, endeavored without success to secure a consular appointment.

BROWNING AIMS TO SERVE MANKIND

In 1835, while still young, he published his second poem, *Paracelsus*, and assumed the attitude toward

humanity he was to adhere to throughout life. In *Pauline*, he had declared his devotion to art, but in *Paracelsus* was shown the growth that had taken place in the two years' interval, by his declaration that it was his intention to serve mankind through the power of his knowledge and intelligence. In *Paracelsus* we find also the first clear statement of his conception of "love as the means of knowledge and of intelligence as the instrument of love." This poem attracted wide attention and won him the friendship of such literary leaders as Wordsworth, Dickens, Landor, and Carlyle. It also brought him the friendship and warm appreciation of William Macready, the noted English actor, at whose suggestion he wrote *Strafford*, a play which, in spite of Macready's acting, ran for only five nights. A like fate was to overtake all of Browning's attempts at writing for the stage.

BROWNING VISITS ITALY

In 1838, Browning went to Italy to gather material and to complete a third long poem begun in 1837. The poem appeared as *Sordello* in 1840. It contained all of the faults of *Pauline* and *Paracelsus* and was more difficult to understand. The reputation Browning had gained from his two earlier poems and with *Strafford*, which showed real ability, was almost if not quite destroyed by *Sordello*. We cannot be at all surprised that, up to this time, the English people found him dull and tedious. How could they know that the man who had written *Sordello* had also written *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *How They Brought the Good News*, and

other poems no less delightful and popular, since he had not chosen to show that side of himself in his published writings?

WINS WORTHY RECOGNITION

But the trip to Italy was productive in other ways. At Asolo, the beautiful little Italian village that he came later so much to love, he wrote the very beautiful *Pippa Passes*, which was published in 1841. For the first time he seems to have arrived at maturity. The poem marked the first of that series of poems and plays that was issued under the general title of *Bells and Pomegranates*. The series was issued in cheap pamphlet form and established for Browning the first real English audience he had so far had. Other numbers in the series included *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Return of the Druses* (1843), *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* (1843), *Colombe's Birthday* (1844), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), and *Luria* (1846).

FAILURE AS A PLAYWRIGHT

This period was, of course, not all passed in Italy, but was spent chiefly in England, with a second visit to Italy in 1844. The plays were produced during this time with various degrees of non-success. A quarrel with Macready spoiled the production of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, perhaps the most actable of the plays. In spite of his undeniable ability in the use of the dramatic monologue, in such poems as *Andrea del Sarto*, and *My Last Duchess*, Browning did not possess the ability to put his characters on the stage so that they

might *act* out their lines. As a matter of fact, the lines do not admit of much acting, for they reveal not what the actors do but what they think. As can be seen everywhere in his poetry, he was interested chiefly in analysis of character rather than in its growth and development.

BROWNING MEETS ELIZABETH BARRETT

After his Italian visit of 1844, he returned to England and read the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett, at that time perhaps the most popular English poet. In her poem, *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, she had made reference to Browning. This fact naturally increased his interest, and he sought an introduction through the good offices of a mutual friend, William Kenyon.

THE HAPPY MARRIAGE

Two days after the visit, Browning threw Miss Barrett and her whole household, excepting her father, who was not informed, into consternation by his proposal of marriage. The proposal was deemed preposterous, ridiculous even. But with great tenacity Browning urged his suit and waited his opportunity. The winter and spring passed and summer waned with no change in the situation, until Miss Barrett's physician ordered her to Italy. Her father would not listen to the suggestion and flew into a terrific rage. This rage was Browning's opportunity. If Mr. Barrett would not permit his daughter to go, Browning would take her himself. With her consent, he entered into a conspiracy with her sisters. Elizabeth Barrett was dressed as for

a walk. Browning joined her and they were married September 12, 1846. Shortly thereafter they were in Florence and had taken up quarters in Casa Guidi, opposite the famous Pitti Palace.

HIS LITERARY INACTIVITY

The life of the two poets together for the next fifteen years makes one of the most charming romances in the history of literature. For Mrs. Browning, the good effect of the removal to Italy was immediate. She greatly improved in health, although of course, she was never quite well. The fifteen years proved to be a period of great literary activity for Mrs. Browning, but of very small output on the part of her husband. For the first three years he did almost nothing, but in 1850 he published *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*. The next few years were spent in visiting between England, France, and Italy. In 1855 Browning published the volume, *Men and Women*, which contained some of the best poetry he had so far written.

BROWNING'S SAD BEREAVEMENT

For the last two or three years before Mrs. Browning's death, she was an almost complete invalid. Browning gave most of his attention to nursing her and to modeling in clay, but little to poetry. After her death, on June 29, 1861, he left Italy not to return until 1878. The great central fact of his life had been his love and marriage. Now that was at an end, he threw himself with more vigor into his work than he had ever before shown.

BROWNING'S GREATEST WORK

In 1868–69, Browning published his greatest work, and, at least in point of size, the greatest poem in English, *The Ring and the Book*. Although recognition of his genius had come to him very tardily, the publication of this great poem brought him what very few poets have possessed, namely, the formation of a cult during his lifetime. From now on his career was one quiet but solid success after another. He was elected Life Governor of London University in 1871; was offered, but declined, the Lord Rectorship of St. Andrews in 1867 and again in 1884; and the Lord Rectorship of the University of Edinburgh, which he also declined, in 1875. Cambridge honored him with its D.C.L. in 1879, Oxford with its D.C.L. in 1882, and Edinburgh with its LL.D. in 1884. These honors show the growing esteem in which he was coming to be held by the younger generation.

His winters were usually spent abroad during this period, with much visiting about while he was at home. In 1871 he published *Balaustion's Adventure* and *Hervé Riel*, the proceeds of which latter he devoted to the aid of the beleaguered citizens of Paris. *Fifine at the Fair* appeared in 1872, *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* in 1873, *Aristophanes' Apology*, and *The Inn Album* in 1875.

HIS LAST DAYS IN ITALY

In 1885 he went with his son, Robert Barrett Browning, to Venice, where the latter bought the Rezzonico Palace in 1888. In 1887 Browning published *Parleyings*

with Certain People of Importance, and in the same year changed his London residence to De Vere Gardens, where he planned to have a home such as he had wished for all of his life. But his plans were broken into by increasing slight indispositions. In 1889 he visited Italy again, this time going to Asolo, which he so greatly loved for its beauty. Here he planned to buy a place to be called Pippa's Tower, but already he was coming very near to the end.

A few weeks thereafter he went to Venice to visit his son. There he contracted cold and died soon after, on December 12, 1889. Florence and Venice both sought the honor of having him buried within their walls, but England offered Westminster Abbey, and there he was buried December 31, 1889.

His last volume, *Asolando*, was published the day of his death.

Leading Events in Browning's Career

1812: Born in Camberwell, London.
1825: Obtained Shelley's poems.
1829: Attended the University of London. Remained two years.
1832: *Pauline* written; published in 1833.
1833–34: Traveled to Russia and visited Italy for the first time.
1835: *Paracelsus.*
1837: *Strafford* produced at the Covent Garden Theatre, London.
1838: Visited Italy again.

1840: *Sordello.*
1841: *Pippa Passes.*
1842: *King Victor and King Charles.* Dramatic Lyrics.
1843: *Return of the Druses; A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* produced at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London.
1844: *Colombe's Birthday* published; Elizabeth Barrett published her *Poems.*
1845: *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics;* Correspondence began with Elizabeth Barrett. Their first meeting.
1846: *Luria; A Soul's Tragedy:* These were published in eight numbers of *Bells and Pomegranates;* Married to Elizabeth Barrett, in London.
1847: Settled at Casa Guidi in Florence.
1849: Robert Barrett Browning born. Death of his mother.
1850: *Christmas Eve and Easter Day.* Mrs. Browning published *Sonnets from the Portuguese.*
1851: Mrs. Browning published *Casa Guidi Windows.*
1853: *Colombe's Birthday* produced at the Haymarket Theatre, London.
1855: *Men and Women.*
1857: Mrs. Browning: *Aurora Leigh.*
1860: Found the "Yellow Book."
1861: Death of Mrs. Browning; Browning left Florence and settled in London.
1863: Complete edition of his works.
1864: *Dramatis Personae.*
1866: His father died.
1867: Honorary M.A. of Oxford.

1868: *The Ring and the Book*, completed in 1869.
1871: *Balaustion's Adventure; Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.*
1872: *Fifine at the Fair.*
1873: *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.*
1875: *Aristophanes' Apology; The Inn Album.*
1876: *Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper.*
1877: *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus* translated.
1878: *La Saisiaz; The Two Poets of Croisic.*
1879: Revisited Italy for the first time after the death of Mrs. Browning; *Dramatic Idyls*, First Series; Elected President of the new Shakespeare Society.
1880: *Dramatic Idyls*, Second Series.
1881. London Browning Society holds its first meeting.
1883. *Jocoseria.*
1884: *Ferishtah's Fancies.*
1887: *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day.*
1889: *Asolando;* Died in the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice; Buried in Westminster Abbey.

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BAYLOR UNIVERSITY, WACO, TEXAS, is famous in English-speaking countries for the large amount of material and books relating to Robert Browning. This collection, gathered together by Dr. A. J. Armstrong, over a period of more than twenty years, is the largest Browning collection in America.

Selected Poems of Browning

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

Browning wrote this poem to please a little boy, the son of William Macready, the actor who produced the poet's *Strafford*. The little fellow was sick, and as he had some facility in drawing, he asked Browning, who visited him, to write a poem for him to illustrate. He had illustrated a previous poem so cleverly that Browning sought a more picturesque subject, to give the boy greater scope for his talent. The result was what E. C. Stedman, the American critic and poet, called "the daintiest bit of folklore in English verse." The original drawings by little Willie Macready are preserved in the Browning Room of the library at Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

The story is a widely circulated one in folklore, being found in ancient India and China. You may be familiar with a somewhat similar idea in the story of Orpheus in Greek folklore. Certainly, the idea of a mountain opening is not one with which you are unfamiliar.

Mrs. Josephine Preston Peabody has given a charming rendering of the story in her play *The Piper*. The wealth of rollicking rhymes has made it a favorite in both England and America. Note the triple rhyme "mutinous" and "glutinous" in lines 50 and 51.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

A CHILD'S STORY

Written for, and inscribed to, W. M. the Younger

I

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,[1]
By famous Hanover[1] city;
The river Weser,[1] deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

II

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,[2]
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

[1] *Brunswick, Hanover City, River Weser.* See frontispiece map.
[2] *Sprats.* Small fish.

III

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
"'Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy[3];
And as for our Corporation[4]— shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV

An hour they sat in council;
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder[5] I'd my ermine gown sell,
I wish I were a mile hence!
It's easy to bid one rack one's brain—
I'm sure my poor head aches again,
I've scratched it so, and all in vain.
Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber-door but a gentle tap?

[3] *Noddy.* Fool.
[4] *Corporation.* City officers or Council.
[5] A guilder is worth about forty cents.

"Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"

V

"Come in!"— the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith and kin:
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: "It's as my great-grandsire,
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

VI

He advanced to the council-table:
And, "Please your honors," said he, "I'm able,
By means of a secret charm, to draw

All creatures living beneath the sun,
That creep or swim or fly or run,
After me so as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole and toad and newt[6] and viper;
And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same check;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
"Yet," said he, "poor piper as I am,
In Tartary I freed the Cham,[7]
Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
I eased in Asia the Nizam[8]
Of a monstrous brood of vampire-bats[9]:
And as for what your brain bewilders,
If I can rid your town of rats
Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
"One? fifty thousand!"— was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

[6] *Newt.* This is a small water animal that somewhat resembles a lizard.

[7] Cham is the title of the ruler of Tartary in Central Asia. It is usually spelled *Khan.*

[8] The Nizam is the ruler of Hyderabad in India.

[9] *Vampire-bats.* So called because they were supposed to suck the blood of animals.

VII

Into the street the Piper stepped,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
Like a candle flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives —
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser,
Wherein all plunged and perished!
— Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,[10]

[10] *Julius Caesar.* See Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar,* Act I, Scene 2, Lines 100–109. The allusion is a reference to the very absurd legend, according to which Julius Caesar, when compelled to abandon his

Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:
Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,[11]
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
Into a cider press's gripe[12]:
And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
And it seemed as if a voice
(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
Is breathed) called out, 'Oh rats, rejoice!
The world is grown to one vast drysaltery[13]!
So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,[14]
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!'
And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,[15]
All ready staved, like a great sun shone
Glorious scarce an inch before me,
Just as methought it said, 'Come, bore me!'
— I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

sinking ship at the siege of Alexandria, swam off holding in one hand above water the manuscript of his *Commentaries*.

[11] *Tripe.* A part of the stomach of the ox, used as food.

[12] *Gripe.* Firm grasp, or clutch.

[13] *Drysaltery.* A place where articles of food like meat and fish are cured by drying and salting.

[14] *Nuncheon.* Light refreshment.

[15] *Sugar-puncheon.* Sugar cask or barrel.

VIII

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
"Go," cried the Mayor, "and get long poles,
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!"— when suddenly, up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders

IX

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock[16];
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.[16]
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gypsy coat of red and yellow!
"Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
"Our business was done at the river's brink;
We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
From the duty of giving you something for drink,
And a matter of money to put in your poke[17];
But as for the guilders, what we spoke

[16] Famous wines.

[17] Pocket or pouch. Sometimes a small sack.

Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X

The Piper's face fell and he cried,
"No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
I've promised to visit by dinner time
Bagdat,[18] and accept the prime[19]
Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
Of a nest of scorpions no survivor:
With him I proved no bargain-driver,
With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver[20]!
And folks who put me in a passion
May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI

"How?" cried the Mayor, "d'ye think I brook
Being worse treated than a Cook?
Insulted by a lazy ribald
With idle pipe and vesture piebald[21]?
You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
Blow your pipe there till you burst!"

XII

Once more he stepped into the street,
And to his lips again

[18] *Bagdat.* Bagdad is in Mesopotamia on the Tigris River.
[19] Prime is the first portion.
[20] A small Dutch coin worth about two cents.
[21] Motley or party-colored.

Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling;
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
Unable to move a step, or cry
To the children merrily skipping by,
— Could only follow with the eye
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
But how the Mayor was on the rack,
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
As the Piper turned from the High Street
To where the Weser rolled its waters
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
However, he turned from South to West,
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,

And after him the children pressed;
Great was the joy in every breast.
"He never can cross that mighty top!
He's forced to let the piping drop,
And we shall see our children stop!"
When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
And when all were in to the very last,
The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
Did I say all? No! One was lame,
And could not dance the whole of the way;
And in after years, if you would blame
His sadness, he was used to say,—
"It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
I can't forget that I'm bereft
Of all the pleasant sights they see,
Which the Piper also promised me.
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
Joining the town and just at hand,
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey-bees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles' wings:
And just as I became assured
My lame foot would be speedily cured,
The music stopped and I stood still,

And found myself outside the hill,
Left alone against my will,
To go now limping as before,
And never hear of that country more!"

XIV

Alas, alas for Hamelin!
There came into many a burgher's[22] pate
A text which says that heaven's gate
Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in[23]!
The Mayor sent East, West, North, and South,
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,
And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavor,
And Piper and dancers were gone forever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,
"And so long after what happened here
On the Twenty-second of July,
Thirteen hundred and seventy-six:"
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children's last retreat,
They called it the Pied Piper's Street —

[22] Freeman of a borough or city.

[23] Compare Matthew, xix, 24.

Where any one playing on pipe or tabor[24]
Was sure for the future to lose his labor.
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
To shock with mirth a street so solemn;
But opposite the place of the cavern
They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.
And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania[25] there's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbors lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trapanned[26]
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.

XV

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men — especially pipers!
And, whether they pipe us free fróm rats or fróm mice,
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

[24] A kind of lute or guitar.
[25] Since the Great War this has formed part of Roumania. See map.
[26] *Trapanned.* Entrapped.

Questions for Class Study

1. Where exactly is the scene of this poem laid?
2. Describe in your own words the condition of affairs at Hamelin before the coming of the Pied Piper.
3. What body of men looked after the affairs of the city at this time? Where did they meet?
4. Describe the appearance of the Mayor.
5. What does "pied" mean?
6. Give an intimate description of the Pied Piper.
7. What special qualifications did the Piper possess for getting rid of the rats?
8. What did the people do after the drowning of the rats?
9. Why did the Mayor and Corporation refuse to pay the Piper?
10. Describe the scene of the drowning as the old rat who survived described it.
11. Why did not the Mayor and Corporation interfere and prevent the Piper from taking the children?
12. Describe the country to which the children were carried by the Piper, as described by the lame boy.
13. Describe the city of Hamelin in later years after the loss of the children.
14. What is the moral Browning draws from the poem?
15. Why do you think this poem is such a general favorite?

SONGS AND TALES OF PATRIOTISM

Browning loved his native land, although he did not write many poems directly expressive of his love. Because of his wife's frail health and for other reasons, he lived much of his life in Italy. In his poem *De Gustibus*, he expresses his undying love of Italy. After his wife's death, however, he proved his devotion to England by returning thither.

Browning's interest was more in people than it was in countries or in regions. The poems, therefore, of patriotism included in this section concern lands other than his own, since his interest was mainly in all humanity rather than in any particular group of it. He was a true, red-blooded Englishman who loved his own country, and who loved all those who loved their own.

Home–Thoughts, from the Sea

Browning wrote this poem off Gibraltar on his second trip to Italy, in 1838. It was written under almost the same circumstances as *How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*. As he views the mammoth fortress, the glory of England comes to his mind and the thought of what the Mother Land has done to help him and how she has made safe the heritage that he cherishes. Trafalgar brings to mind the great achievement of the gallant Nelson, and he praises God and prays for the nation he loves.

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA

Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent[1] to the Northwest
died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into
Cadiz Bay[1];
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar[1]
lay;
In the dimmest Northeast distance dawned Gibraltar[2]
grand and gray.
"Here and here did England help me: how can I help
England?"— say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise
and pray,
While Jove's planet[3] rises yonder, silent over Africa.

Questions for Class Study

1. When and under what circumstances did Browning write this poem?

2. Locate on the map the places mentioned in the poem.

3. Against whom did Nelson fight at Trafalgar?

4. What are some of the ways in which a great poet like Browning helps his native land?

[1] *Cape Saint Vincent, Cadiz Bay, Trafalgar.* These are located on the southeastern coast of the Spanish peninsula (see frontispiece map), and were the scenes of famous exploits on the part of the English fleet in 1797, 1596, and 1805, respectively.

[2] *Gibraltar.* A strong English fortress at the entrance to the Mediterranean.

[3] Jupiter, the planet.

Home-Thoughts, from Abroad

Browning was in Italy when he wrote *Home-Thoughts, from Abroad.* Spring in England is a delightful season. The greening lawns, the well-kept hedges, the hawthorn blossoms, all make for a delicious charm and quietude that cannot be forgotten, no matter how far one may go away or however long he may remain. The description of the thrush is one of the most exquisite of nature descriptions to be found in English poetry.

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brush-wood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole[1] are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England — now!
And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops — at the bent spray's edge —
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over[2]
Lest you should think he never could recapture

[1] *Bole.* Trunk.

[2] This is an instance of Browning's keen observation of nature.

The first fine careless rapture!
And, though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower[3]
— Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

Questions for Class Study

1. Describe the scene in England as it is in April. As it is in May. Compare these scenes with those in your own locality.

2. What birds are mentioned? What flowers?

3. Why do you think Browning sees, while abroad, such clear-cut pictures of his homeland?

Pheidippides

This poem gives a splendid insight into the history and life of Athens at a time when the hosts of Persia, under the leadership of Darius, aimed to conquer Greece. Despite the refusal of Sparta's aid the Athenians, under Miltiades, won the great victory of Marathon in 490 B.C. The story of "Pheidippides" is taken from the Greek historian Herodotus. The embellishments that Browning adds make a more interesting story, and develop the character of Pheidippides until he stands before us as one of the greatest of unsung heroes.

As you read the poem, note the three divisions into which it falls. *First*, Pheidippides tells how he ran from Athens to Sparta, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, in forty-eight hours, to seek aid against the

[3] Children in England love to play with the buttercups and daisies.

Persians. When Sparta refused to do nothing more than consider until the time of the full moon, he started back to Athens. On the way, he met the god Pan, who asked why Athens alone of all Greece refused to worship him. He gave Pheidippides a sprig of fennel as a pledge that he would help the Athenians at Marathon ("Marathon" in Greek is the name of a fennel field). On to Athens raced Pheidippides with the fennel pledge and the promise of help from the great god Pan. *Second*, Miltiades, the Greek general at the battle of Marathon, asks Pheidippides what reward is promised himself. *Third*, the story is told in the person of the poet who reports that the youth told Miltiades he would not have to race any more, but that he could fight in the ranks against the Persians, and that he would marry the lady he loved and live the remainder of his days in peace. Though he fought in the battle when Persia was defeated, he it was who was commissioned to carry the message of victory back to the Athenians. Crying aloud his message of victory, "Rejoice, we conquer!" he fell dead. At the close of the poem is an explanation of why to this day the word of salutation of the Greeks is "Rejoice."

PHEIDIPPIDES

Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν[1]

First I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, daemons[2] and heroes, honor to all!

[1] "Rejoice, we conquer."

[2] Daemons refers to the lesser divinities in the Greek hierarchy, the guardian spirits of hill and plain.

Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
— Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the Aegis and spear![3]
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin,[4] praised be your peer,
Now, henceforth and forever,— O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan[5]— patron I call!

Archons[6] of Athens, topped by the tettix,[7] see, I return!
See, 'tis myself here standing alive, no specter that speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta[8] for aid!

[3] *Her of the aegis and spear.* The reference is to Pallas Athene, the patron goddess of the Athenians. The aegis, or shield, and the spear were the emblems of Athene.

[4] *Ye of the bow and the buskin.* Artemis, or Diana, is addressed here. She was represented as a huntress, with buskined legs and a bow. The buskin was a kind of half boot.

[5] Pan is a Greek word meaning *all.* He was the god of the forest. The word *panic* is derived from Pan because he is said to have appeared at the battle of Marathon and caused terror among the Persians.

[6] *Archons.* The nine chief magistrates of ancient Athens.

[7] *Tettix.* The grasshopper, a symbol of the right of Athens to occupy the territory she possessed.

[8] Another famous city in Greece.

Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,
Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has come!
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth,[9]
Razed to the ground is Eretria[10]— but Athens, shall Athens sink,
Drop into dust and die — the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die, with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?
Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er destruction's brink?
How,— when? No care for my limbs!— there's lightning in all and some —
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens — Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,

[9] These were symbols of submission.
[10] An island city, north of Athens.

Malice,— each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering,— the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch from dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athene, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis,[11] clang them 'Ye must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos![12] Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come,— does Athens ask aid,— may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment — too weighty the issue at stake!
Count we no time lost time which lags through respect to the gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds
In your favor, so long as the moon, half-orbed,[13] is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:

[11] *Phoibos and Artemis.* Apollo and Diana.

[12] *Olumpos.* Olympus, a mountain which the Greeks believed to be the abode of the gods.

[13] Merely an excuse so as not to send aid.

Athens must wait, patient as we — who judgment
suspend."

Athens,— except for that sparkle,— thy name, I had
moldered to ash!
That sent a blaze through my blood; off, off and
away was I back,
— Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false
and the vile!
Yet "O gods of my land!" I cried, as each hillock and
plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past
them again,
"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honors we paid
you erewhile?
Vain was the filleted victim,[14] the fulsome libation![15]
Too rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay,[16]— I bid you cease to en-
wreathe
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's
foot,
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never
adorn a slave!

[14] The heads of animals offered in sacrifice to the gods were usually adorned with ribbons.

[15] The offering of wine or oil made to the gods, which was poured on the ground.

[16] Oak wreaths were for Zeus, olive for Athene, and bay for Phoebus.

Rather I hail thee, Parnes,[17]— trust to thy wild waste tract!
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure?— at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!"

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:
"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?[18]
Athens to aid? Though the dive were through Erebos,[19] thus I obey —
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge
Better!"— when — ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that are?

[17] *Parnes.* Herodotus says the meeting took place on Mount Parthenion, not far from Athens.

[18] *Fosse.* Ditch.

[19] *Erebos.* Hades.

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he — majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped[20] wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof:
All the great god was good in the eyes grave-kindly — the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs[21] grand I saw.
"Halt, Pheidippides!"— halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious began:
"How is it,— Athens, only in Hellas,[22] holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane,[23] makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?
Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia — so much as strews not the soil — is cast in the sea,

[20] *Ivy drooped.* Crowned with ivy.

[21] *Goat-thighs.* The Greeks thought Pan to be half goat and half human. Browning, later on, calls him "The Goat-God."

[22] *Hellas.* Greece.

[23] *Fane.* Altar.

Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh,[24] made one cause with the free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!' "
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
— Fennel[25]— I grasped it a-tremble with dew — whatever it bode)
"While, as for thee" . . . But enough! He was gone. If I ran hitherto —
Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens — earth no more, the air was my road:
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon[26] rare!

Then spoke Miltiades,[27] "And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,— what gift is promised thyself?
Tell it us straightway,— Athens the mother demands of her son!"

[24] *Greaved-thigh.* Greave is the armor for the leg below the knee.
[25] Fennel is the Greek word for Marathon.
[26] Reward or prize.
[27] Miltiades was leader of the Greeks at the battle of Marathon.

Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance —"Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'[28]

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
Pound — Pan helping us — Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away forever; and then,— no Athens to save,—
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees,— recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full — rewarding him — so!"

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:

[28] *Pelf.* Spoil or booty.

So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis![29]
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed[30] is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,
Till in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died — the bliss!

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still "Rejoice!"— his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy forever,— the noble strong man
Who could race like a god, bear the face of a god, whom a god loved so well;
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously — once to shout, thereafter be mute:

[29] *Akropolis.* The citadel of a Greek city.
[30] *Meed.* Reward or gift.

"Athens is saved!"— Pheidippides dies in the shout
for his meed. 120

Questions for Class Study

1. To what deities does Pheidippides render homage in the first stanza?

2. Who were the following: Zeus, Pan, Archons of Athens, Athene, Phoibos and Artemis, Miltiades?

3. Why did Pheidippides run from Athens to Sparta?

4. What appeal did Pheidippides make to Sparta?

5. How did the Spartans respond? Did Sparta really want to aid Athens? Explain.

6. Describe Pan as he appeared to Pheidippides.

7. Why does not Pheidippides tell the reward that Pan offered him (Line 84)?

8. What was the reward Pan promised Pheidippides?

9. What reward did he actually receive?

10. What symbols of submission did the Persians demand from the Greeks?

11. How is the patriotism of the Greek and his love of nature emphasized in this poem?

12. Give a summary of the leading characteristics of Pheidippides.

13. What to you are the strongest points of the poem?

Hervé Riel

After James II was deposed by the English Parliament in 1689, the crown was offered to William of Orange and his wife Mary. The French King, Louis

XIV, took up the cause of James II and went to war with England and Holland. At the battle of La Hogue, off the cape of that name, May 16, 1692, the combined English and Dutch fleets defeated the French fleet. On this occasion the episode of Hervé Riel (er-vā′ rē-el′) occurred.

The incident is a true one, and is duly recorded in the records of the French admiralty. The only liberty Browning took with the narrative was in making Hervé ask for a holiday for only one day instead of for life. In this way he added to the dramatic value of the poem by contrasting the small reward with the big achievement. The poem was first published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, and the £100 which Browning received for it he gave to the suffering inhabitants of Paris after the siege of 1871. The poem had been written four years earlier at Le Croisic, a small fishing village near the mouth of the Loire, and the home of Hervé Riel. Tennyson's ballad of *The Revenge* is composed on a similar episode and may well be read with this poem.

HERVÉ RIEL

I

On the sea and at the Hogue,[1] sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French — woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,

[1] La Hogue is a cape off the coast of Normandy.

Came crowding ship on ship to St. Malo[2] on the
Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II

'Twas the squadron that escaped, with the victor in
full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship,
Damfreville[3];
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signaled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbor, take us quick
— or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will!"

III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt
on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to
pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard,[4] rocks to port, all the passage
scarred and scored,
Shall the *Formidable* here with her twelve and eighty
guns

[2] St. Malo is a seaport on the northern coast of France, at the mouth of the river Rance.

[3] Damfreville was the commander of the French fleet.

[4] The right side of a vessel when a person stands on board facing the bow. *Port* is the left side.

Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter where 'tis ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full[5] beside?
Now 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?[6]
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V

"Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;

[5] Full-tide.

[6] At that time Plymouth was an English naval port.

For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
— A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate — first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville[7] for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.[8]

VI

And, "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins?[9] Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève[10] where the river disembogues?[11]
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,

[7] *Pressed by Tourville.* Tourville was the French admiral. "Pressed" means impressed into service.

[8] Croisickese is an inhabitant of Le Croisic, a fishing village in Brittany, which Browning liked to visit.

[9] Inhabitants of St. Malo.

[10] Grève is the name of the sands between St. Malo and Mont St. Michel.

[11] Disembogues means "empties."

Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.[12]
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse
than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe
me there's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this *Formidable* clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I
know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,
— Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I've nothing but my life,— here's my head!"
cries Hervé Riel.

VII

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!"
cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north wind, by God's grace!
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,

[12] The name of a fortified town on the mainland.

Keeps the passage as its inch of way were the wide
sea's profound!
See, safe through shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates
the ground,
Not a spar[13] that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past,
All are harbored to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"— sure as
fate,
Up the English come — too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the
Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's coun-
tenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"

[13] *Spar.* A nautical term for a mast, a yard, boom, etc.

What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not
Damfreville."

X

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it
but a run?—
Since 'tis ask and have, I may —
Since the others go ashore —

Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the
Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,— nothing more.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to
wrack[14]
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.[15]
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre,[16] face and flank!
You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé
Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honor France, love thy wife the
Belle Aurore!

[14] *Wrack.* Wreck or ruin.

[15] *Bore the bell.* Won the victory.

[16] The Louvre is a great art gallery of Paris, in which, among many of the world's most famous paintings, are hung the portraits of French heroes.

Questions for Class Study

1. Contrary to his usual custom, Browning tells this story in his own person. Which method do you like better, this, or that in which he makes one of the actors tell the story (the dramatic monologue)? Why?

2. To what place were the French pursued?

3. Why did the pilots refuse to take the French ships into harbor?

4. What objections did the pilots raise?

5. What proposal was made by the council and by Damfreville?

6. Under what circumstances does Hervé Riel appear?

7. What is the substance of his speech?

8. Why does he ask for the biggest ship? Why was he specially fitted to pilot it?

9. What is the meaning of line 75? What is shown of Hervé in this passage?

10. How does Hervé behave after the ships are safe in the harbor?

11. What motive may Browning have had in altering Hervé's request for a holiday for a lifetime to one day's holiday?

12. Why does Browning enjoy making poems about unsung heroes?

13. In what sense does the poem imply a compliment to France? (Recall that at the time of the incident narrated the English and French were fighting each other; also that Browning purposely published the poem in 1871 in order to use the proceeds to help the

Parisians, who had just been defeated by the Germans in the Franco-Prussian War.)

14. Select the three most interesting and most vivid passages of the poem.

15. Memorize your favorite passage.

16. Give a list of the strongest characteristics Hervé Riel showed in this poem.

17. Give in your own words a brief sketch of the poem.

Incident of the French Camp

The story that Browning narrates in *Incident of the French Camp* is founded on fact, although the real hero was a man and not a boy. The incident occurred at the storming of Ratisbon in Bavaria by Napoleon in 1809. The city is situated on the right bank of the river Danube (see map), and since the tenth century has experienced seventeen sieges, the last of which took place when Napoleon stormed the town.

You will have to imagine the scene as the story opens, for it begins so abruptly that you may get into it without understanding the situation. The narration occurs after the battle, of course. Some of Napoleon's soldiers are gathered at an inn, recalling some old days and the glory of the Little Corporal, and his ability to inspire deeds of great heroism in his soldiers. The story-teller is standing, and we may assume that he takes Napoleon's customary attitude, "Legs wide, arms locked behind."

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP

I

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans
That soar, to earth may fall,
Let once my army-leader Lannes
Waver at yonder wall,"—
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

III

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect —
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace
We've got you Ratisbon!
The Marshal's in the market-place,
And you'll be there anon
To see your flag-bird[1] flap his vans[2]
Where I, to heart's desire,
Perched him!" The chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V

The chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes;
"You're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
"I'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the situation as the poem opens?
2. Describe Napoleon as here pictured.
3. What is here told us of the rider?
4. What was the condition of the rider as shown in stanza III?
5. Explain "smiling joy." Why was it that he "held himself erect"?

[1] Flag-bird refers to the eagle, the Napoleonic insignia.

[2] Vans are wings, from the Latin *vannus*.

6. What message did he bring?

7. What further did the message itself tell of the messenger?

8. What was the first effect of the message on Napoleon?

9. Explain fully the meaning of the last stanza.

10. What does this stanza reveal as to Napoleon's character?

"How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix"

Browning wrote this poem in 1838 on his second visit to Italy, while he was on board ship off the African coast. In answer to a letter from an American, he wrote the following about the poem, "There is no sort of historical foundation for the poem about 'Good News from Ghent,' I wrote it under the bulwarks of a vessel, off the African coast, after I had been at sea long enough to appreciate even the fancy of a good gallop on the back of a certain good horse 'York,' then in my stable at home."

The poem, therefore, has no basis in historical fact, though those who are curious about such matters seem to think they have discovered an incident that might have served as foundation. What you are to get out of it is just what Browning himself put into it, namely, a rousing good story of three brave men and their brave horses, and the fine rhythm in which their story is told. Ghent is ninety miles from Aix and is one of the important cities of modern Belgium.

HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX"

I

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern,[1] the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique[2] right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III

'Twas moonset[3] at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren,[4] the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;

[1] *Postern.* The city gate. Cities were walled in those days.

[2] The pique is the pommel of the saddle.

[3] They set out at midnight.

[4] *Lokeren, Boom, Düffeld, Mecheln, Aershot,* etc. Villages on the road from Ghent to Aix.

At Düffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

IV

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare through the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

V

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,— ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes[5] which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!
Your Roos[6] galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
We'll remember at Aix"— for one heard the quick wheeze

[5] Froth.

[6] A Dutch word for horse.

Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

VIII

"How they'll greet us!"— and all in a moment his roan[7]
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;

[7] A roan is a reddish-brown colored horse, with gray or white colored hairs.

Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad
or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X

And all I remember is,— friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses[8] voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news
from Ghent.

Questions for Class Study

1. Who are the three riders at starting?

2. Why didn't the speaker tighten the saddle-girth before starting? Why did he loosen the bit?

3. How does line 2 fit the sense? Show how this is carried throughout the poem.

4. Why did not the men talk with each other?

5. What picturesque expressions are found in stanza IV?

6. How is the horse idealized to us in stanza V?

7. Name in order, the towns through which the riders galloped.

8. Show how the changing time of day is indicated in the poem.

9. By what steps has Browning centered our attention and sympathy on Roland?

10. Why does the speaker act as he does (stanza IX)?

[8] Burgesses are free citizens of a borough.

11. Did Roland survive the strain? Give reasons for your conclusion.

12. What was the state of the country at the time these events happened?

The Italian in England

This poem was written after Browning's visit to Italy in 1844, and it originally bore the title of "Italy in England." The speaker is an Italian patriot who has taken part in an unsuccessful revolution against Austria, and who has fled for refuge to England. His reflections comprise the expression of his great love for his native country and hatred for the Austrian oppression, a wish for the utter discomfiture of his enemies, and a desire to see once more the woman who had risked her own life in helping him escape.

Again, Browning merely uses history to form a background for an invention of his own though it describes with historical accuracy the struggle of Italian liberals against the oppression of Austria. To understand the situation, you must recall from your history the division of Europe among the great powers after the downfall of Napoleon in 1815. Lombardy and Venetia were placed under Austrian domination. But the Italian people, determined to have liberty from the oppression under which they had so long suffered, began a series of revolutions that was not ended until nearly fifty years later. It is said that Mazzini, the leader of the Young Italy, or revolutionary party, used to read this poem to his followers to show how an

Englishman could sympathize with the spirit of Italian liberty. Years before this, Lord Byron, another great English poet, had similarly inspired in the Greek revolutionists a love of liberty and a feeling of sympathy toward England.

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

That second time they hunted me
From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds through the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,—
I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles,[1] when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,
Bright creeping through the moss they love:
— How long it seems since Charles was lost!
Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
The country in my very sight;
And when that peril ceased at night,
The sky broke out in red dismay
With signal fires; well, there I lay
Close covered o'er in my recess,
Up to the neck in ferns and cress,

[1] Charles Albert, Prince of Carignano, at first supported the Revolutionists, but later turned against them. There is some basis of truth in the reference to Charles having played with the Italian patriot in his youth, since he was brought up simply and educated at a public school.

Thinking on Metternich[2] our friend,
And Charles's miserable end,
And much beside, two days; the third,
Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
The peasants from the village go
To work among the maize; you know,
With us in Lombardy, they bring
Provisions packed on mules, a string
With little bells that cheer their task,
And casks, and boughs on every cask
To keep the sun's heat from the wine;
These I let pass in jingling line,
And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
The peasants from the village, too;
For at the very rear would troop
Their wives and sisters in a group
To help, I knew. When these had passed,
I threw my glove to strike the last,
Taking the chance: She did not start,
Much less cry out, but stooped apart,
One instant rapidly glanced round,
And saw me beckon from the ground;
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt[3];
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that; my glove lay in her breast.

[2] Prince Metternich, the Austrian prime minister, was the leading figure at the Congress of Vienna, 1815, which endeavored to destroy Italian liberty.

[3] *Crypt.* Hiding place. Also the vault under the main floor of a church.

Then I drew breath: they disappeared:
It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts; on me
Rested the hopes of Italy;
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 'twas told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth;
I meant to call a freak of youth
This hiding, and give hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood,
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm —
At first sight of her eyes, I said,
"I am that man upon whose head
They fix the price, because I hate
The Austrians over us: the State
Will give you gold — oh, gold so much!—
If you betray me to their clutch,
And be your death, for aught I know,
If once they find you saved their foe.
Now, you must bring me food and drink,
And also paper, pen and ink,
And carry safe what I shall write
To Padua, which you'll reach at night

Before the duomo[4] shuts; go in,
And wait till Tenebrae[5] begin;
Walk to the third confessional,
Between the pillar and the wall,
And kneeling whisper, *Whence comes peace?*
Say it a second time, then cease;
And if the voice inside returns,
From Christ and Freedom; what concerns
The cause of Peace?— for answer, slip
My letter where you placed your lip;
Then come back happy; we have done
Our mother service — I, the son,
As you the daughter of our land!"

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:
I was no surer of sunrise
Than of her coming. We conferred
Of her own prospects, and I heard
She had a lover — stout and tall,
She said — then let her eyelids fall,
"He could do much"— as if some doubt
Entered her heart,— then, passing out,
"She could not speak for others, who
Had other thoughts; herself she knew[6]:"

[4] The duomo is the Cathedral of St. Anthony.

[5] Tenebrae means "darkness." It is a name applied to a service of the Roman Church, in commemoration of the Crucifixion during Holy Week. Here an evening service.

[6] Ordinarily this direct quotation would read,

"I cannot speak for others who
Have other thoughts; myself I know."

And so she brought me drink and food.
After four days, the scouts pursued
Another path; at last arrived
The help my Paduan friends contrived
To furnish me: She brought the news.
For the first time I could not choose
But kiss her hand, and lay my own
Upon her head — "This faith was shown
To Italy, our mother; she
Uses my hand and blesses thee."
She followed down to the seashore;
I left and never saw her more.

How very long since I have thought
Concerning — much less wished for — aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die!
I never was in love; and since
Charles proved false, what shall now convince
My inmost heart I have a friend?
However, if I pleased to spend
Real wishes on myself — say, three —
I know at least what one should be.
I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distill
In blood through these two hands. And next,
— Nor much for that am I perplexed —
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart
Under his new employers. Last
— Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast

Do I grow old and out of strength.
If I resolved to seek at length
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
— Disowned me long ago, men say;
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so — perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine —
Are turning wise: while some opine
"Freedom grows license," some suspect
"Haste breeds delay,"[7] and recollect
They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen "All's for best,"
The land seems settling to its rest.
I think, then, I should wish to stand
This evening in that dear, lost land,
Over the sea the thousand miles,
And know if yet that woman smiles
With the calm smile; some little farm
She lives in there, no doubt: What harm
If I sat on the door-side bench,
And, while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,
Inquired of all her fortunes — just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them. I'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,

[7] The usual comments of dull, inactive, and indifferent persons.

Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing — how
It steals the time! To business now.

Questions for Class Study

1. Where is the speaker? What story is he telling?

2. Who was Metternich? Charles? How were they related to this story?

3. What is told us in line 1?

4. How did the Austrians hunt the fugitive? Was he a nobleman or a peasant? Give reasons.

5. What does the way the woman acts when struck by the glove show you as to her character and interests?

6. What is suggested in line 46? Why does he trust the woman so completely?

7. What sort of woman does he expect to find? Why did he change his plans and tell her the truth about himself?

8. What does he tell her to do?

9. Is his faith in her justified? Why will she not tell her lover of his hiding-place?

10. What does he say is his chief concern in life?

11. What are his three wishes? What do they tell us?

12. What does he tell us of his former companions and of the present condition of the revolution in Italy?

13. Point out the passages showing the character of the peasant woman. Tell what each passage shows.

14. In what sense does this woman personify Italy? What are the best patriotic touches of the poem?

The Patriot

In this poem Browning tells a story of a patriot that he calls "an old story." It has no location, no historical background, no particular character. Instead it tells the "old story" of popular favor and popular fickleness.

In the beginning, as the patriot himself tells the story, the people strewed roses in his way wherever he went. The whole town was decorated in his honor, and he says if he had asked for the sun from their skies, they would have given it to him if they could. But a year later, when he has done everything he can for them, given them even the sun itself, they have turned against him, and are leading him forth to the scaffold. Instead of the wreaths of roses that crowned him, he is bound by a rope and stoned by the populace as he passes. And then, in the hour of his death, there comes to him the thought that instead of looking to men for rewards and punishment, it were better if he had looked to God. And so, feeling secure in God's judgment, he goes to his death.

THE PATRIOT

An Old Story

I

It was roses, roses all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
The house roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

II

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, "Good folk, mere noise repels —
But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
They had answered, "And afterward, what else?"

III

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Naught man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV

There's nobody on the house-tops now —
Just a palsied few at the windows set[1];
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate[2]— or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

V

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

[1] Where they had been carried by their friends.
[2] Market gate.

VI

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
"Paid by the world, what dost thou owe[3]
Me?"— God might question; now instead,
'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so. 30

Questions for Class Study

1. Who is speaking in the poem?
2. What is the situation as the poem opens?
3. What tells us the degree of the love of the people for their hero?
4. Explain, "The air broke into a mist with bells."
5. What, in stanza II, tells of the boundless love of the people?
6. What change of mood is suggested by "Alack"?
7. Why is nobody on the housetops now? How long is this after the events of the opening scene?
8. What, in stanza V, shows the degree of popular hatred for the former hero?
9. Who has changed, the hero or the people? Explain.
10. What wish comes to the speaker (line 2, stanza VI)?
11. Explain "I am safer so."
12. What do you think Browning wished to interpret to us in this poem?
13. Describe in your own words the treatment meted out to the speaker when in his glory and the change which took place in a year's time.

[3] Owe is here used in the original meaning *ask of*.

BEAUTIFUL SONGS

Although Browning did not have a great gift for the song itself, yet he was master of many emotional moods expressed in varying rhythms. You will note in the songs following how he varies rhythm to express the sense and meaning. There is the easy, care-free bluffness of a tavern song; the marching rhythm of a stirring martial song; the sweet tenderness of the songs of little Pippa. Browning could not content himself for the most part with the mere expression of an emotion; hence, his pure lyric output is small as compared with the bulk of his total verse. But you will note also in many others of the poems included in this collection that there is real and beautiful music in them.

Cavalier Tunes

The three songs which make up *Cavalier Tunes* appeared at the beginning of *Dramatic Lyrics,* one of the divisions of *Bells and Pomegranates,* the third number of which was published in 1842. For the historical background, you must recall the struggle between Charles I and the Puritans, from 1642 to 1649. The first of the songs is vivid with the martial swing of marching men; the second is a tavern song; the third gives the motion of a rapid gallop. These three songs have been set to music by Doctor Villiers Stanford.

I. MARCHING ALONG

Kentish Sir Byng[1] stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed[2] Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.
God for King Charles! Pym[3] and such carles[4]
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles![5]
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're —

CHORUS

Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

Hampden[6] to hell, and his obsequies' knell,
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry[7] as well!

[1] An imaginary figure.

[2] The courtiers of the time wore their hair in long, curling locks, but those who fought for Parliament had their hair closely cropped and so were called "crop-headed" or "Roundheads."

[3] John Pym was the leader of Parliament in the attempt to curb the power of the King.

[4] "Carles" is an Old English word close in meaning to "churls."

[5] Speeches.

[6] Hampden was a noted Parliamentary leader.

[7] These three were Puritan leaders. Young Harry was the son of Sir Henry Vane, the Secretary of State for the King.

England, good cheer! Rupert is near![8]
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here,

CHORUS

Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the devil that picks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham,[9] fresh for the fight,

CHORUS

March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

II. GIVE A ROUSE

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse[1]: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?

[8] Prince Rupert of Bavaria was a nephew of King Charles and a daring cavalry leader.

[9] *Nottingham.* Charles unfurled his banner here at the beginning of the Civil War.

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[1] *Rouse.* Drink health to.

Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

CHORUS

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's[2] damned troopers shot him?

CHORUS

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III. BOOT AND SADDLE[1]

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray.

CHORUS

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!

[2] Noll was the nickname of Oliver Cromwell.

[1] "Boots and Saddles" is the bugle call to cavalry for mounted drill.

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay —

CHORUS

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Bracepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,

CHORUS

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
I've better counselors; what counsel they?

CHORUS

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS STUDY

1. Who are the singers of *Marching Along*? Who is the King Charles referred to in the song?

2. Summarize from your knowledge of history the facts that form the background of *Marching Along*.

3. Under what conditions is the song *Give a Rouse* to be sung?

4. What difference do you find in rhythm and movement between the three poems?

5. What common characteristics have these poems?

New Year's Hymn

This is the song that little Pippa sings when she starts out to "see the happiness" of people at their various tasks. The theme of the song, "All service ranks the same with God," is the theme of the longer poem and the truth which Pippa discovers for herself. The hymn says that we all, whatever our tasks, are doing what God directs that we shall do, and that in His great scheme of things and in His great view of small human life, no deed, no event, is either great or small, but that all rank equally with Him.

Pippa is a little girl employed at the silk mills of Asola, in Northern Italy, who is given one day's holiday from her labors. Setting forth in the morning of her holiday to find the "four happiest ones," she finds each of them in some dark hour of crisis, and it is her happy songs that cheer their lives and that bring them some solace and happiness.

NEW YEAR'S HYMN

from "Pippa Passes"

All service ranks the same with God:
If now, as formerly he trod
Paradise, his presence fills
Our earth, each only as God wills
Can work — God's puppets, best and worst,
Are we; there is no last nor first.

Say not a "small event"! Why "small"?
Costs it more pain that this, ye call

A "great event," should come to pass,
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power shall fall short in or exceed!

Questions for Class Study

1. What statement of Jesus' could form the basis of the statement "there is no last nor first"?
2. In what sense are we "God's puppets"?
3. What is the construction of "me" after "untwine"?
4. What is the meaning of the second stanza?
5. What comfort or cheer is found in this song?

"The Year's at the Spring"

This exquisite song Pippa sings as she climbs the hillside to where Ottima, one of the "happiest four" in Asolo, sits with her paramour Sebald, who has killed her husband and is about to crown her. As they hear the song, a realization of their sin comes to them. They recognize God's rule of the universe, and commit suicide.

"THE YEAR'S AT THE SPRING"

from "Pippa Passes"

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;

The snail's on the thorn:
God's in his heaven —
All's right with the world!

Questions for Class Study

1. Give the substance of the meaning of this little lyric in your own words.
2. Do people who criticize "All's right with the world," do full justice to Browning's meaning? Explain.
3. How was Pippa's song instrumental in convincing Ottima and Sebald that they had done wrong?
4. What in this song would convict the heart of a guilty person? Explain.
5. Why do you think this is one of the most popular stanzas in the English language?

"Give Her But a Least Excuse to Love Me"

This dainty song is based on a legend that a page at the court of Catherine Cornaro, Queen of Cyprus from 1473 to 1488, was so much in love with her that he could not perform his service. The page sings the first four lines of each stanza, then the Queen hears him and asks to hear more, but the maid tells her it is only the page singing to himself as he goes about his work.

"GIVE HER BUT A LEAST EXCUSE TO LOVE ME"

from "Pippa Passes"

I

Give her but a least excuse to love me!
When — where —
How — can this arm establish her above me,
If fortune fixed her as my lady there,
There already, to eternally reprove me?
("Hist!"— said Kate[1] the queen;
But "Oh," cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'Tis only a page that carols unseen,
Crumbling your hounds their messes!")

II

Is she wronged? — To the rescue of her honor,
My heart!
Is she poor? — What costs it to be styled a donor
Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!
("Nay, list!"— bade Kate the queen;
And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'Tis only a page that carols unseen,
Fitting your hawks their jesses!")[2]

[1] Kate is Catherine Cornaro, the Queen of Cyprus. Her palace is still to be seen at Asolo, given to her by the Venetians when she abdicated Cyprus in favor of the Venetian Republic.

[2] *Jesses.* Strings of silk or leather fastened to the legs of hawks when they were taken out hunting.

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the lament of the page in the first stanza?
2. How does the maiden explain the song?
3. What does the page say in the second stanza?
4. What is the effect of the page's song on the Queen?
5. Give in your own words the delicate meaning of this song.

"You'll Love Me Yet"

This song celebrates the patience of the lover, who believes that love will conquer even death. The same theme is treated in *Evelyn Hope* and in *Never the Time and the Place.*

"YOU'LL LOVE ME YET"

from "Pippa Passes"

I

You'll love me yet! — and I can tarry
  Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
  From seeds of April's sowing.

II

I plant a heartful now: some seed
  At least is sure to strike,
And yield — what you'll not pluck indeed,
  Not love, but, may be, like.

III

You'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look? — that pays a thousand pains.
What's death? You'll love me yet!

Questions for Class Study

1. Who is speaking and to whom?
2. What situation is revealed in the first sentence?
3. What shows the lover's mood of resignation?
4. What confidence has he in the success of his suit? Explain.
5. What here is "A grave's one violet"?
6. What, according to this song, is the power of love?

Song From "James Lee's Wife"

James Lee's Wife is a series of nine monologues spoken by a wife who feels that her husband has ceased to love her. She still loves him and seeks by one means and another to bring back his love to her.

In this poem she selects an autumn morning to go out among the rocks and ponder the situation. The mood of the place and the day suits her own. She is coming to the autumn of life, which has been rough and rocky, but as she looks about her she finds that nature is glorious still, that the sun, symbol of constancy, has not withdrawn his caressing touch from "the brown old earth." With this thought she is ready

to accept the inevitable, feeling that her own love has been made more worthy by not having its reward, and she begins to find a philosophy of life that will make bearable the situation.

SONG FROM "JAMES LEE'S WIFE"

Among the Rocks

I

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

II

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting of this song.

2. What is the mood of the time and place? How does it fit in with the wife's mood?

3. What is the truth she learns as she ponders her plight and how does the autumn day help to bring it about?

4. What do you think of her philosophy about loving? Is a love that is "wholly well for you" a selfish love? Is there any advantage in continuing to love some one who does not love you? Any reward? Explain.

5. Just what is the central thought of this song?

POEMS OF LOVE

Very many of Browning's poems might be called "poems of love," but those included in the section that follows are more especially concerned with that theme. To Browning the supreme attributes of God were Love and Power. The manifestation of God in the world, then, according to his belief, is shown best in these qualities in His creatures. The two are inseparable. Love is Power, and Power in God is tempered by Love. In *Saul* is found the best exposition of the poet's thought along this line. A fuller, though somewhat less highly poetic statement of the same theme is found in *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, which you would do well to read.

Love between a man and a woman forms the theme of very many of Browning's poems; so also, does love to God, God's love to us, and the altruistic love of men for men simply as God's creatures. The link between them all with Browning is close. With him, love is love, although it may manifest itself in many different ways, and according to our differing relationships.

Summum Bonum

Summum Bonum, "The Highest Good," is Browning's theme in this beautiful little poem. It is remarkable both as being the most complete statement of his belief that the *highest good* and therefore the greatest happiness of humanity is found in a perfect love between the

sexes, and also because the poem was written in the last year of his life. Browning was a great lover, as we can see particularly in the poems which he wrote to his wife, and as revealed by his devotion to her. No more exalted and beautifully passionate love poems are to be found in the writings of any other poet.

SUMMUM BONUM

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine,— wonder, wealth, and — how far above them —
Truth, that's brighter than gem,
Trust, that's purer than pearl,—
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe — all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.

Questions for Class Study

1. Explain the meaning of the first line. Of the second line. Of the third line.
2. How does Truth compare with the gem?
3. How does Trust compare with the pearl?
4. What are the meanings of *Truth* and *Trust* as here used?
5. What, then, are the two virtues that Browning finds in the "kiss of one girl"?
6. Why is the poem entitled *Summum Bonum?*

Companion Poems

Love in a Life and *Life in a Love* are companion poems. The first poem tells how the object of a man's love constantly eludes him even though in the same house as himself. The day passes, yet his search continues fruitless, for as he enters each room she goes out, leaving behind her the clinging perfume of her presence. In the second poem a man devotes his whole life to "love" with high hope that some day the one whom he is pursuing will cease to elude him.

LOVE IN A LIFE

I

Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her —
Next time, herself! — not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew:
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

II

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune —
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.

Spend my whole day in the quest,— who cares?
But 'tis twilight, you see,— with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

Questions for Class Study

1. What does the lover find as he seeks through the house for love?

2. Does Browning mean to suggest that love is never to be found in life? Give reasons for your answer.

3. Just what seems to be the real meaning of the poem?

LIFE IN A LOVE

Escape me?
Never —
Beloved!
While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear:
It seems too much like a fate, indeed!
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.
But what if I fail of my purpose here?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, get up and begin again,—
So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound
At me so deep in the dust and dark,

No sooner the old hope goes to ground
Than a new one, straight to the selfsame mark,
I shape me —
Ever
Removed!

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the lover's determination as each time she sets up some new means of escaping him?
2. Why should he continue to "shape him a new hope, ever removed"?
3. What is the central thought of the poem?

"The Moth's Kiss, First!"

In this charming love song Browning conceives the attitude of the woman who wishes her lover to begin his wooing by kissing her hesitantly at first, as the moth flits lightly over the chalice of the flower, half closed and more than half reluctant; and then boldly, as the bee plunges to the bottom of the cup to drink to the fill all the nectar and sweetness lying waiting for it. The woman in the poem *In a Gondola* is the singer of the song. The lovers have stolen away in a gondola in spite of the "Three"—"Himself"— one may guess a husband — and the two brothers of the woman, who have sworn revenge. From one ecstasy of love to another they go, until at the close, when the man is stabbed, life is such an exquisite joy that death does not seem to matter.

"THE MOTH'S KISS, FIRST!"

from "In a Gondola"

The moth's kiss, first!
Kiss me as if you made believe
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed
Its petals up; so, here and there
You brush it, till I grow aware
Who wants me, and wide ope[1] I burst.

The bee's kiss, now!
Kiss me as if you entered gay
My heart at some noonday,
A bud that dares not disallow
The claim, so all is rendered up,
And passively its shattered cup
Over your head to sleep I bow.

Questions for Class Study

1. As the moth flits over a flower at evening does it seem to have any definite purpose? Give your reasons.

2. What is the purpose of the bee as it plunges deep into the heart of the flower?

3. What delicate interpretation of love is given in this poem?

The Flower's Name

In *The Flower's Name* Browning imagines a lover revisiting the scenes of his wooing an old sweet-

[1] *Ope.* Open—chiefly used by poets.

heart. The setting is a garden, and as the lover wanders among the flowers he comes to one which was especially attractive to her, who had given it a name in Spanish which he cannot recall.

THE FLOWER'S NAME

Here's the garden she walked across,
  Arm in my arm such a short while since:
Hark, now I push its wicket,[1] the moss
  Hinders the hinges and makes them wince!
She must have reached this shrub ere she turned,
  As back with that murmur the wicket swung;
For she laid the poor snail, my chance foot spurned,
  To feed and forget it the leaves among.

Down this side of the gravel-walk
  She went while her robe's edge brushed the box:
And here she paused in her gracious talk
  To point me a moth on the milk-white phlox.[2]
Roses, ranged in valiant row,
  I will never think that she passed you by!
She loves you, noble roses, I know;
  But yonder, see, where the rock-plants lie!

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,
  Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim;
Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,
  Its soft meandering Spanish name:

[1] *Wicket.* A small gate.

[2] A kind of flower.

What a name! Was it love or praise?
Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?
I must learn Spanish, one of these days,
Only for that slow sweet name's sake.

Roses, if I live and do well,
I may bring her, one of these days,
To fix you fast with as fine a spell,
Fit you each with his Spanish phrase;
But do not detain me now; for she lingers
There, like sunshine over the ground,
And ever I see her soft white fingers
Searching after the bud she found.

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,
Stay as you are and be loved forever!
But, if I kiss you 'tis that you blow not,
Mind, the shut pink mouth opens never!
For while it pouts, her fingers wrestle,
Twinkling the audacious leaves between,
Till round they turn and down they nestle —
Is not the dear mark still to be seen?

Where I find her not, beauties vanish;
Whither I follow her, beauties flee;
Is there no method to tell her in Spanish
June's twice June since she breathed it with me?
Come, bud, show me the least of her traces,
Treasure my lady's slightest footfall!
— Ah, you may flout and turn up your faces —
Roses, you are not so fair after all!

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting to this poem.
2. What is told us in "the moss hinders the hinges"?
3. Why does the lover notice everything so minutely?
4. What does the incident of the snail signify as to her character?
5. What flower would you say the poet loved best before his lady gave the Spanish name to the flower he tells of?
6. Why does he describe the name as "Speech half-asleep or song half-awake"?
7. Why does he not want the bud to open?
8. To what are the two closing lines addressed?
9. Point out the most delicately beautiful passages of the poem.

Never the Time and the Place

Even if this love poem were not so beautiful, it would hold especial interest because Browning wrote it in the very last years of his life. What a mind his must have been that could so splendidly and completely retain its youth! What a depth of ability to love that an old man could have written so beautiful and so passionate a love lyric!

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE

Never the time and the place
  And the loved one all together!
This path — how soft to pace!
  This May — what magic weather!

Where is the loved one's face?
In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy, sly and serpentine,
Uncoil thee from the waking man!
Do I hold the Past
Thus firm and fast
Yet doubt if the future hold I can?
This path so soft to pace shall lead
Through the magic of May to herself indeed!
Or narrow if needs the house must be,
Outside are the storms and strangers: we —
Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
— I and she!

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the lover longing for?

2. Does the lover actually see the face of his beloved? Where does he see it?

3. What is the reference to the "narrow house"?

4. What is the enemy that is trying to keep him and his beloved apart?

5. What assurance does he get from his memory of the Past? What promise does he find for the future?

6. What of Browning's own experiences and hopes are embodied in the poem?

The Last Ride Together

In this great poem, Browning imagines a lover, who begs of his beloved as a last boon before they part forever, just one ride together. Rather than talk about the whole sorry matter, he says he must be doing something, and so, "as for me — I ride." In the swing and exhilaration of the ride under God's happy sky, he finds the last solace his companionship with his beloved one can bring him. There is no repining, no complaining, but an unflinching acceptance of the fate that has been dealt him, that must express itself in the movement of the ride.

As they ride together he talks of the deeds that great men have done, but with all their doing there remains yet "The petty done, the undone vast." After all, the fact remains that the highest joy, paradise itself, is found in —"that I and she ride, ride together, forever ride." The lover, denied the realization of his ideal, finds supreme joy in permission to remain forever in the presence of that ideal — "forever ride."

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

I

I said — Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
  Since this was written and needs must be —
My whole heart rises up to bless

Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,— I claim
Only a memory of the same,
— And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side,
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
Who knows but the world may end to-night?

III

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions — sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once —
And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
Thus leant she and lingered — joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,— all labor, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

VI

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?

What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.[1]
My riding is better, by their leave.

VII

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you — poor, sick, old ere your time —
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII

And you, great sculptor — so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn![2]
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?

[1] This is a reference to Westminster Abbey, where many of the most famous men of Great Britain are buried.

[2] *Burn.* Brook — commonly used in Scotland.

What, man of music, you grown gray
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,[3]
But in music we know how fashions end!"
I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

IX

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being — had I signed the bond —
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X

And yet — she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two,
With life forever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,—

[3] *Intend.* Pretend.

And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, forever ride?

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the situation as the poem opens?
2. What is the "fate" mentioned?
3. What does line 5 tell of the lover?
4. Explain fully the meaning of lines 6 and 7.
5. What hope had she given?
6. Why desire a "last ride" when the "fate" is well known? How do you explain this?
7. From stanza II, characterize the loved one.
8. Explain "one day more I am deified."
9. What is the effect on him of the ride? Explain "My soul smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll."
10. What consolation to the lover is revealed in stanza V? Just what is his thought?
11. Explain the simple meaning of the first four lines in stanza VI.
12. What is the reward of the statesman? The soldier? The poet? The sculptor? The composer?
13. How does the fate of each compare with his lot?
14. What is the relationship between heaven and remaining in the presence of one's ideal?
15. Summarize briefly the thought of the poem.

Count Gismond

This poem recounts a stirring tale of chivalry. The Countess Gismond tells her friend, Adela, of the circumstances under which she met her husband and of

the thrilling events directly leading to their marriage. The women are alone in a room of the castle. Count Gismond and his sons return from a hunting trip just as she completes the narrative. In the poem, the Countess is speaking of the happenings of many years before.

COUNT GISMOND

Aix in Provence[1]

I

Christ God who savest man, save most
  Of men Count Gismond who saved me.
Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
  Chose time and place and company
To suit it; when he struck at length
My honor, 'twas with all his strength.

II

And doubtlessly, ere he could draw
  All points to one, he must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
  Few half so happy as I seemed,
While being dressed in queen's array
To give our tourney prize away.

III

I thought they[2] loved me, did me grace
  To please themselves; 'twas all their deed;

[1] *Provence.* Aix was a city in southern France, thirty miles from Marseilles. See map.

[2] *They.* The cousins.

God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed
My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
A word, and straight the play had stopped.

IV

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head!

V

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling
A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs —

VI

And come out on the morning troop
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,
And called me queen,[3] and made me stoop
Under the canopy — (a streak
That pierced it, of the outside sun,
Powdered with gold its gloom's soft dun) —

[3] *Queen.* Queen of the tournament that was about to begin.

VII

And they could let me take my state
  And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
  My queen's-day — Oh I think the cause
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

VIII

However that be, all eyes were bent
  Upon me, when my cousins cast
Theirs down; 'twas time I should present
  The victor's crown,[4] but . . . there, 'twill last
No long time . . . the old mist again
Blinds me as then it did. How vain!

IX

See! Gismond's at the gate, in talk
  With his two boys[5]: I can proceed.
Well, at that moment, who should stalk
  Forth boldly — to my face, indeed —
But Gauthier? and he thundered "Stay!"
And all stayed. "Bring no crowns, I say!

[4] *Victor's crown.* Crown awarded to the champion in the tourney contests.

[5] *Boys.* Lines 46–50. The speaker, due to her strong emotions, inserts these passages.

X

"Bring torches! Wind the penance-sheet
About her! Let her shun the chaste,
Or lay herself before their feet!
Shall she, whose body I embraced
A night long, queen it in the day?
For honor's sake no crowns, I say!"

XI

I? What I answered? As I live,
I never fancied such a thing
As answer possible to give.
What says the body when they spring
Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
Strength on it? No more says the soul.

XII

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan: who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end?

XIII

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead.

XIV

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
  The heart of the joy, with my content
In watching Gismond unalloyed
  By any doubt of the event:
God took that on him — I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

XV

Did I not watch him while he let
  His armorer just brace his greaves,[6]
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
  The while! His foot . . . my memory leaves
No least stamp out, nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on.

XVI

And e'en before the trumpet's sound[7]
  Was finished, prone lay the false knight,
Prone as his lie, upon the ground:
  Gismond flew at him, used no sleight
O' the sword, but open-breasted[8] drove,
Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

[6] Tighten the straps that secure the leg armor.

[7] *Trumpet's sound.* At a trumpet signal, the combatants rode toward each other from opposite ends of the field, and with leveled lances tried to unhorse each other.

[8] *Open-breasted.* Without shield and careless of guarding himself.

XVII

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
And said, "Here die, but end thy breath
In full confession, lest thou fleet
From my first, to God's second death!
Say, hast thou lied?" And, "I have lied
To God and her," he said, and died.

XVIII

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
— What safe my heart holds, though no word
Could I repeat now, if I tasked
My powers forever, to a third
Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
Until I sank upon his breast.

XIX

Over my head his arm he flung
Against the world; and scarce I felt
His sword (that dripped by me and swung)
A little shifted in its belt:
For he began to say the while
How South our home lay many a mile.

XX

So, 'mid the shouting multitude
We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten! May his soul find grace!

XXI

Our elder boy has got the clear
Great brow; tho' when his brother's black
Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
And have you brought my tercel[9] back?
I was just telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting of this poem.
2. Why does the speaker begin her narrative by invoking a blessing on Count Gismond?
3. How long previously had the events narrated taken place (stanza IX)?
4. What is told us of Count Gauthier in stanza I?
5. Why call the morning *miserable?* Was it miserable to her then?
6. Why does she now say she *seemed* happy?
7. Why were the cousins so jealous of her?
8. What is told us of her in that she regarded her cousins as very beautiful at the time?
9. What does "glancing sideways with still head" tell us?
10. What honor was the speaker given at that time? Describe the scene of which she was the center.
11. Why did the cousins alone cast their eyes down?
12. What do the breaks in the narrative (stanza VIII) tell us?

[9] *Tercel.* A hunting hawk.

13. What is shown of Gauthier in the accusation he so boldly made?

14. What is shown in her in that it never occurred to her to answer?

15. What is shown of Gismond in her description of what followed? How could she know at once that she was saved?

16. In what sense was the verdict written in blood?

17. In what sense was the lie *dead?*

18. Describe the combat that followed.

19. What is told us of Count Gismond in the combat?

20. What events followed the combat?

21. Why does she change the subject so abruptly at the close?

22. What are the strongest points revealed in the character of Count Gismond?

A Face

In this poem the poet imagines the face of a beautiful girl painted upon a gold background, such as was commonly used by the Byzantine school of painting. Such a background, he believed, would bring out the vivid coloring and beautiful form and line.

A FACE

If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,
Such as the Tuscan's early art[1] prefers!

[1] The early art of the Tuscans followed the influence of the Byzantine school in preferring gold backgrounds. Tuscany was a province of Italy.

No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile; not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft
Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's
Burthen of honey-colored buds, to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her lithe[2] neck, three fingers might surround,
How it should waver, on the pale gold ground,
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts!
I know, Corregio[3] loves to mass, in rifts
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb
Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb:
But these are only massed there, I should think,
Waiting to see some wonder momently
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky,
(That's the pale ground you'd see this pale face by),
All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

Questions for Class Study

1. Explain the reference to the Tuscan art.
2. What details are given in this poem picture?
3. What is here told of Corregio's art?
4. Describe the picture painted by the poet in this poem.

[2] *Lithe.* Pliant or flexible.

[3] Correggio (1494–1534), an Italian painter, was remarkable for the gradations of his light and shade, and massed his angel faces against brilliant depths of sky.

Evelyn Hope

In a darkened room beside the body of a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl sits an old man, who has devotedly loved her but who has not dared tell her so. As he sits by her body, his thought goes out with her spirit into the land to which it has gone, and he finds comfort in the thought that he shall have the chance again to love her and that perhaps she may love him. As a pledge of his love he places within the "sweet cold hand" the love token, a geranium leaf, which he hopes she will carry with her on her long journey, and "will wake, and remember, and understand." There is nothing in his mood of the passion of love or of its pain and anguish; merely a calm faith that love will and must conquer, even though the grave reach out its cold hand and crush his beloved.

The theme of the poem is a favorite one with Browning, namely, the immortality of love. Its charm lies as much in the tender, hopeful mood of the lover, as in the delicious music of the words and the thoughts he expresses.

EVELYN HOPE

I

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
  Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her bookshelf, this her bed;
  She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die, too, in the glass;
  Little has yet been changed, I think:

The shutters are shut, no light may pass
  Save two long rays through the hinge's chink.

II

Sixteen years old when she died!
  Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;
It was not her time to love; beside,
  Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
  And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
  And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
  What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,[1]
  Made you of spirit, fire, and dew[2] —
And, just because I was thrice as old
  And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was naught to each, must I be told?
  We were fellow mortals, naught beside?

IV

No, indeed! for God above
  Is great to grant, as mighty to make,

[1] *Horoscope.* Astrologers profess the ability to foretell the events of any one's life according to the disposition of the stars at his birth.

[2] The ancients believed that all things were made of earth, sky, fire, and water. Hence *spirit, fire,* and *dew* were the choicest of these four elements.

And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V

But the time will come, at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red —
And what you would do with me, in fine,[3]
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

VII

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while!
My heart seemed full as it could hold;

[3] At last, or in short.

There was place and to spare for the frank young
smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young
gold.
So, hush,— I will give you this leaf to keep:
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting of this poem.
2. Describe the room in which Evelyn Hope lay dead.
3. What tells how recently she has passed away?
4. What tells us of the nature and age of the speaker? Of Evelyn Hope?
5. What shows the nature of his love for Evelyn Hope?
6. Explain the meaning of lines 25–27.
7. Explain, "Delayed it may be for more lives yet."
8. What revelations will come in "the new life"?
9. What is their "secret"?
10. What interpretation of love is here given?

Companion Poems

Meeting at Night and *Parting at Morning* are companion poems. In the first it is clearly the man that is speaking. He is a sailor who has been away and has come home to his loved one. Perhaps the speaker in the second poem is a woman. As she watches her

lover sail away in the sunrise, she feels that the man's love has gone out of her life, and that it cannot be replaced by a "world of men." These poems were originally published under the title of *Night and Morning*.

MEETING AT NIGHT

I

The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

PARTING AT MORNING

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim;
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting of these poems.
2. Describe the scene in the first poem. What pen pictures are painted for us?
3. What expressions help make the pictures vivid?
4. What is the thought of the second poem?

The Lost Mistress

In this beautiful little poem the poet tells how it will feel to the lover who realizes that his sweetheart is just to be a friend. At the close, there is a touch of very tender pathos — the lover just cannot give up his hold on the loved hand, as it were, and lingers to caress it just once more.

THE LOST MISTRESS

All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
  As one at first believes?
Hark, 'tis the sparrow's good-night twitter
  About your cottage eaves!

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
  I noticed that, to-day;
One day more bursts them open fully
  — You know the red turns gray.

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
  May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we,— well, friends the merest
  Keep much that I resign:

For each glance of the eye so bright and black
Though I keep with heart's endeavor,—
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stay in my soul forever! —

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the meaning of "All's over"?
2. What is the "truth" to which the poet refers in the first line?
3. Why does he mention the twitter of the sparrows?
4. What is the significance of the second stanza? Why mention that "the red turns gray"?
5. What are some of the things that her "merest friends" will keep that he resigns?
6. What is it that he will keep? Just what is the real meaning of this?
7. Tell in your own words the meaning of the poem.

Love Among the Ruins

The scene of this poem may well be laid in the ruins of the great cities of the ancient world. Certain it is that Browning wrote the poem in Rome in the winter of 1853–4, and that he may well have had in mind particularly an evening in Italy "among the ruins of

cities once great and famous." The poem, with a touch of melancholy, tells us of a vast city with "domed and daring palaces" now in majestic ruins "overrun by a vegetation which is the symbol of eternal beauty, lovingly covering the decaying handiwork of a long vanished people."

Serenely waiting in the little turret that alone remained to tell the story of vast colonnades, and turrets, and temples, and aqueducts, and bridges, stands a golden-haired maiden with eyes of love. The "whole centuries of folly, noise, and sin," as typified by the sombre ruins, are contrasted with love that alone endures, and the author exclaims in triumphant mood "Love is best!"

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

Where the quiet-colored end of evening smiles,
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop —
Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

Now,— the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,

To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)
Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,
Twelve abreast.[1]

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone —
Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
Long ago;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
Struck them tame;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

Now,— the single little turret[2] that remains
On the plains,
By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
Overscored,

[1] *Twelve abreast.* Broad marble walls, hundred-gated, show the ancient strength and splendor of the city.

[2] *Single little turret.* Shows the completeness of the desolation.

While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
Through the chinks —
Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring,[3] all round, the chariots traced
As they raced,
And the monarch and his minions and his dames
Viewed the games.

And I know, while thus the quiet-colored eve
Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished gray
Melt away —
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
Waits me there
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul[4]
For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
Till I come.

But he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
Colonnades,

[3] *Burning ring.* The great circus ring, scene of the races and games.

[4] *Charioteers caught soul.* From this turret the king and his lords viewed the contests and awarded the prizes.

All the causeys,[5] bridges, aqueducts,[6]— and then,
All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
Each on each.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force —
Gold, of course.[7]
Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

Questions for Class Study

1. What in brief is the setting of this poem?
2. For what is this country-side now used? What is the mood of the opening lines?

[5] *Causeys.* Causeways, or paved roadways.

[6] *Colonnades . . . aqueducts.* Other evidences of the former greatness and glory of the city.

[7] *Of course.* The four lines preceding tell of the wonderful resources of fighting men, chariots, and gold.

3. What expressions tell of the greatness and grandeur of the city that once stood here?

4. What expressions tell of the present desolation?

5. Select five passages which paint especially vivid pictures.

6. What one vestige of ancient glory alone remains?

7. Who awaits the speaker there? Describe the anticipated meeting scene.

8. Describe the scene as formerly viewed by the king from this place.

9. What thought causes the speaker's blood to freeze?

10. What thought causes it to burn?

11. What, according to the poem, outlasts "Whole centuries of folly, noise, and sin"?

12. Explain fully the author's meaning as indicated in the last line.

POEMS ADDRESSED TO MRS. BROWNING

Of the four poems in this section only one is avowedly addressed to Mrs. Browning. But the references in each of the others are so certainly to her that it has seemed not unwise to include them all under this heading. You will recall that when Browning married Elizabeth Barrett she was the most popular poet in England. Browning himself had failed of any great success.

After Browning's marriage he and Mrs. Browning went off at once to Italy, for her health and for the less expense of living. Mrs. Browning's health rapidly improved, and the two spent fifteen happy years in the land they both so much loved. Mrs. Browning inspired Browning to do better things than he had ever done before, and this was the best period of his life. She helped him give the needed popular turn to his poetry. One can easily imagine how she showed him to be less heedless of public opinion. Browning loved her with a passionate devotion and gave public recognition to her help in several poems, especially in *One Word More.* Indeed, Browning used to say it was she who had the genius and not himself. England in that day thought so too. Mrs. Browning was frequently much angered that the people who loved her so much should slight her husband so cruelly.

My Star

This poem doubtless refers to the poet's wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Mrs. Browning has shown the woman's side of this perfect love match in her beautiful *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, which in many ways show both her devotion and her high poetic genius.

MY STAR

All that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)[1]
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles[2] the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn[3] above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Questions for Class Study

1. Does Browning's "Star" reveal its soul to anyone but to him? Explain.

[1] The reference is to the Iceland spar.

[2] This word may have been coined by Browning. It means "to dart repeatedly."

[3] *Saturn.* One of the planets next in magnitude to Jupiter.

2. Where do his friends get their comfort?

3. What is the real reason he loves this "star"?

4. Select the poetic expressions that add touches of beauty to the poem.

O Lyric Love

This lyric occurs at the close of the first part of *The Ring and the Book*, Browning's longest poem. It is in the nature of a poetic prayer to his wife, who, he claims, is the inspiration of whatever poetic ability he may possess. It is as though he found himself faced with a gigantic task in the very midst of his great work and paused to utter this prayer to the ideal love which was the guiding star of his life and work.

O LYRIC LOVE

O lyric love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart —
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory — to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due

To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand —
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
— Never, conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,— so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

Questions for Class Study

1. To what does the poet liken his love in the first line?

2. In what particular is she human and in what particular more than human?

3. How does the poet claim he learned to write poetry?

4. In the memory of them, what have her smile and her thinking become to the poet?

5. What to you are the most beautiful expressions in the poem?

By the Fireside

In this poem, the poet imagines what he will do as an old man, "When the long dark autumn evenings come." He will be sitting by the fire, idly reading a book, "Not verse now, only prose." The children,

thinking him busy over his Greek, will slip away to the creek to cut a mainmast for their ship. The Greek will bring to him memories of loved days in Italy, where in the Alps he and his loved one had spent so many happy hours. He describes the beautiful woodland scene in the mountains; the chapel, and the priest, and the people who come there. Then his thoughts come to "My perfect wife, my Leonor," sitting beside him, with whom alone he could have come this long way to life's precipice, and who responds perfectly to his mood of tender musing.

The wonder of their perfect bliss is a growing one since the day they first met, and he would recall it from the start and live it over again, each sweet event and happening, and especially the delicious evening when of her own sweet will, her heart came fluttering down to him, and they became lovers instead of mere friends.

Then he reflects on how one single act of a soul, be it hate or be it love, shapes destinies for good or for ill, and that his own was shaped and made blissful by this single little act of hers. She, the loved one, sitting there by the fire, with her "great brow, and the spirit-small hand propping it," has made one more real man for earth and for heaven too.

BY THE FIRESIDE

I

How well I know what I mean to do
When the long dark autumn evenings come;
And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue?

With the music of all thy voices, dumb
In life's November too!

II

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,
O'er a great wise book, as beseemeth[1] age,
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows,
And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose!

III

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
"There he is at it, deep in Greek:
Now then, or never, out we slip
To cut from the hazels by the creek
A mainmast for our ship!"

IV

I shall be at it indeed, my friends!
Greek puts already on either side
Such a branch-work forth as soon extends
To a vista opening far and wide,
And I pass out where it ends.

V

The outside-frame, like your hazel-trees —
But the inside-archway widens fast,
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
And we slope to Italy at last
And youth, by green degrees.

[1] Becomes.

VI

I follow wherever I am led,
  Knowing so well the leader's hand:
Oh woman-country, wooed not wed,
  Loved all the more by earth's male-lands
Laid to their hearts instead!

VII

Look at the ruined chapel again
  Half-way up in the Alpine gorge!
Is that a tower, I point you plain,
  Or is it a mill, or an iron forge
Breaks solitude in vain?

VIII

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
  The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
  The thread of water single and slim,
Through the ravage some torrent brings!

IX

Does it feed the little lake below?
  That speck of white just on its marge
Is Pella[2]; see, in the evening-glow,
  How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets heaven in snow!

[2] Pella is a village in northern Italy.

X

On our other side is the straight-up rock;
And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
By boulder-stones, where lichens mock
The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block.

XI

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
And thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!
For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun,
These early November hours,

XII

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needled mat of moss.

XIII

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
Last evening — nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
Where a freaked fawn-colored flaky crew
Of toad-stools peep indulged.

XIV

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
That takes the turn to a range beyond,

Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge,
Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
Danced over by the midge.[3]

XV

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
Blackish-gray and mostly wet;
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
See here again, how the lichens fret
And the roots of the ivy strike!

XVI

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams —

XVII

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
Or the wattled cote[4] where the fowlers spread
Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

XVIII

It has some pretension too, this front,
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise

[3] *Midge.* Small gnats or flies.

[4] Cot.

Set over the porch, Art's early wont;
'Tis John in the Desert,[5] I surmise,
But has borne the weather's brunt —

XIX

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
For a pent-house[6] properly projects
Where three carved beams make a certain show,
Dating — good thought of our architect's —
Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

XX

And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times;
The place is silent and aware;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.

XXI

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,
With whom besides should I dare pursue
The path gray heads abhor?

XXII

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them;
Youth, flowery all the way, there stops —

[5] *John in the Desert.* John the Baptist.

[6] *Pent-house.* A shed or roof attached and sloping from a wall or building.

Not they; age threatens and they contemn,
Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
One inch from life's safe hem!

XXIII

With me, youth led . . . I will speak now,
No longer watch you as you sit
Reading by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Mutely, my heart knows how —

XXIV

When, if I think but deep enough,
You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme;
And you, too, find without rebuff
Response your soul seeks many a time,
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff.

XXV

My own, confirm me! If I tread
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that, by its side,
Youth seems the waste instead?

XXVI

My own, see where the years conduct:
At first, 'twas something our two souls
Should mix as mists do; each is sucked
In each now: on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct.

XXVII

Think, when our one soul understands
  The great Word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
  How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

XXVIII

Oh I must feel your brain prompt mine,
  Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
  See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the divine!

XXIX

But who could have expected this
  When we two drew together first
Just for the obvious human bliss,
  To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss?

XXX

Come back with me to the first of all,
  Let us lean and love it over again,
Let us now forget and now recall,
  Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall!

XXXI

What did I say? — that a small bird sings
  All day long, save when a brown pair

Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
Strained to a bell: 'gainst noon-day glare
You count the streaks and rings.

XXXII

But at afternoon or almost eve
'Tis better; then the silence grows
To that degree, you half believe
It must get rid of what it knows,
Its bosom does so heave.

XXXIII

Hither we walked then, side by side,
Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
And still I questioned or replied,
While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
Lay choking in its pride.

XXXIV

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,
And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
And care about the fresco's loss,
And wish for our souls a like retreat,
And wonder at the moss.

XXXV

Stoop and kneel on the settle under,
Look through the window's grated square:
Nothing to see! For fear of plunder,
The cross is down and the altar bare,
As if thieves don't fear thunder.

XXXVI

We stoop and look in through the grate,
  See the little porch and rustic door,
Read duly the dead builder's date;
  Then cross the bridge that we crossed before,
Take the path again — but wait!

XXXVII

Oh moment one and infinite!
  The water slips o'er stock and stone;
The West is tender, hardly bright:
  How gray at once is the evening grown —
One star, its chrysolite![7]

XXXVIII

We two stood there with never a third,
  But each by each, as each knew well:
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
  The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

XXXIX

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
  And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
  Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!

[7] Yellow or greenish stone or gem.

XL

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her:
I could fix her face with a guard between,
And find her soul as when friends confer,
Friends — lovers that might have been.

XLI

For my heart had a touch of the woodland time,
Wanting to sleep now over its best.
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,[8]
But bring to the last leaf no such test!
"Hold the last fast!" runs the rhyme.

XLII

For a chance to make your little much,
To gain a lover and lose a friend,
Venture the tree and a myriad such,
When nothing you mar but the year can mend:
But a last leaf — fear to touch!

XLIII

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddying down till it find your face
At some slight wind — best chance of all!
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
You trembled to forestall!

[8] Midsummer.

XLIV

Worth how well, those dark gray eyes,
  That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonize,
  And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize!

XLV

You might have turned and tried a man,
  Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
  His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

XLVI

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
  And filled my empty heart at a word.
If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
  They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
One near one is too far.

XLVII

A moment after, and hands unseen
  Were hanging the night around us fast;
But we knew that a bar was broken between
  Life and life: we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

XLVIII

The forests had done it; there they stood;
  We caught for a moment the powers at play.

They had mingled us so, for once and good,
Their work was done — we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

XLIX

How the world is made for each of us!
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,
When a soul declares itself — to wit,
By its fruit, the thing it does!

L

Be hate that fruit, or love that fruit,
It forwards the general deed of man,
And each of the Many helps to recruit
The life of the race by a general plan;
Each living his own, to boot.

LI

I am named and known by that moment's feat;
There took my station and degree;
So grew my own small life complete,
As nature obtained her best of me —
One born to love you, sweet!

LII

And to watch you sink by the fireside now
Back again, as you mutely sit
Musing by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Yonder, my heart knows how!

LIII

So, earth has gained by one man the more,
And the gain of earth must be heaven's gain too;
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
When autumn comes — which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting of this poem.
2. Who is speaking? Explain "life's November."
3. What contrasting picture of youth is given in stanza III?
4. What memories does his Greek book bring to him? Why?
5. To what country does Browning refer in line 28?
6. Describe the scene in the gorge.
7. What details tell us whether or not Browning is a close student of nature?
8. Characterize Leonor.
9. How does youth seem as compared with such age (stanza XXV)?
10. Just what delicate relationship exists between the speaker and Leonor (stanzas XXVI–XXIX)?
11. What of their happy past experiences is here revealed?
12. Explain the meaning of stanza L.
13. What does the last stanza tell us?
14. Give in your own words a brief summary of the poem.

One Word More

This is the only poem addressed to Mrs. Browning directly. It occurs at the close of the volume *Men and Women*. The reference in the first stanza is to the fifty poems comprised in that volume. What he means to say is that he would dedicate the volume to her, but that he wants her to take him also. Then he wonders how he can best show his love for her. He would do as other great artists had done, who had abandoned their usual medium of expression for their loved ones, and had dedicated to them their talents in forms that the crowd did not look for. But, as for him, there was no other medium available. He could not paint or draw or dedicate his love to her in marble, but he would do the best he could and abandon his usual form of composition and speak to her in his own proper person.

ONE WORD MORE

To E. B. B.

I

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael[1] made a century[2] of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume

[1] Rafael (Raphael) was a great Italian painter (1483–1520).
[2] One hundred.

Dinted[3] with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas:
These, the world might view — but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask?[4] Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her lifetime?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving —
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas —
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that's left with lilies in the Louvre —
Seen by us and all the world in circle.[5]

[3] Written.

[4] *Who that one, you ask?* Raphael is supposed to have written three or four sonnets to the daughter of a baker who was the subject for several of his famous pictures.

[5] The references here are to the Madonnas painted by Raphael. "San Sisto" refers to the Sistine Madonna, in the Dresden Museum; the Madonna of Foligno is in the Vatican at Rome; the Madonna at Florence is the Madonna del Granduco; in the Louvre at Paris is the Madonna of the Garden, circular at the top, hence "seen in circle."

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni,[6] like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the treasure!"
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice,"[7]
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,[8]
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence) —
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he —"Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)

[6] Guido Reni was an Italian painter (1575–1642).

[7] Dante, the most famous of Italian poets, relates his love for Beatrice, whom he worshiped afar, in the *Vita Nuova*.

[8] The incident referred to here occurs in Dante's *Inferno*, xxxii.

"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet —"Then I stopped my painting.'

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not? — than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke those "people of importance:"
We and Bice[9] bear the loss forever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient —
Using nature that's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry,—
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,—
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,

[9] *Bice.* Beatrice; pronounced Bē′-che.

So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,[10]
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked —"Shall smiting help us?"
When they drank and sneered —"A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks — "But drought was pleasant."
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savors of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness — the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude —
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"

[10] Moses. Compare Numbers, xx, 11.

Guesses what is like to prove the sequel —
"Egypt's flesh-pots[11]— nay, the drought was better."

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,[12]
Right-arm's rod-sweep,[13] tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's[14] daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Ethiopian bondslave,)[15]
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me,
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;

[11] Compare Exodus, xvi, 3.
[12] Compare Exodus, xxxiv, 29.
[13] Compare Numbers xx, 11.
[14] Zipporah, the wife of Moses. Compare Exodus, ii, 21.
[15] Compare Numbers, xii, 1.

Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us —
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.[16]
He who works in fresco steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge[17] with flowerets.
He who blows through bronze may breathe through silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,— the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving;
I am mine and yours — the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the fifty.[18]

[16] Browning writes lines to express his own emotions.

[17] A reference to the decorated margins of medieval prayer-books.

[18] The names are of characters in Browning's poems.

Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland, or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with color,
Drifted over Fiesole[19] by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,[20]
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house-roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,[21]
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),

[19] A quaint mountain village overlooking Florence.

[20] A church, hill, and cemetery rising above Florence and the valley of the Arno, on the opposite side of the valley from Fiesole, called *San Miniato.*

[21] The moon is on the wane.

All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos[22]),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman —
Blank to Zoroaster[23] on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo[24] on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats[25]— him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal —
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu[26]
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure — the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,

[22] A reference to the Greek myth of Endymion, loved by Diana, the moon-goddess.

[23] Zoroaster was the founder of the religion of the Persians.

[24] Galileo, the Italian, was one of the greatest astronomers of all time (1564–1642).

[25] Keats, the English poet.

[26] Exodus, xxiv.

Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you — yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side — there's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you —
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song — and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel — borne, see, on my bosom!

Questions for Class Study

1. How did Rafael express himself to his love? Dante? Why did Dante never finish his picture of Beatrice?

2. What is meant by the line, "Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow"?

3. How is the reference to Moses in stanza IX pertinent to the thought of the poem?

4. Read the references in stanza X and explain the thought in your own words.

5. On what attainment must Browning stand? Explain.

6. How does the work of the writer compare with that of the painter or other artist?

7. What is meant by line 126, "He who blows through bronze may breathe through silver"?

8. Explain the meaning of lines 139–143.

9. How does the moon compare with "the meanest of God's creatures"?

10. What is Browning's fuller meaning in "yourself my moon of poets" (line 188)?

11. What is the meaning of the closing stanza?

12. Summarize briefly the poem and tell in your own words its largest meaning.

STUDIES IN CHARACTER

Emphasis on Persons

There are other poems in this volume that might have been included in this section. Browning was so much more interested in persons than in anything else, that nearly everything he wrote centers about some individual. Moods in nature are made only the background for some human action. Thoughts and opinions find their most complete expression as they are lived and made part of the characters of human beings. The poems in this section, however, seem unmistakably to emphasize the development of character or its momentary expression, and our interest is more in the persons than in the ideas they express.

Confessions

In this very characteristic monologue, Browning pictures the death-bed of an old sinner who would make no pretense of eleventh-hour repentance and who dismissed the priest with his irreverent recalling of a youthful love-affair. Over all the old rascal's misdeeds there lingers yet the sanctifying power of a genuine love, the scene of which the medicine bottles on the bed-stand help him to recall.

CONFESSIONS

What is he buzzing in my ears?
"Now that I come to die,
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

What I viewed there once, what I view again
Where the physic bottles[1] stand
On the table's edge,— is a suburb lane,
With a wall to my bedside hand.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
From a house you could descry
O'er the garden wall; is the curtain blue
Or green to a healthy eye?

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
Blue above lane and wall;
And that farthest bottle labeled "Ether"
Is the house o'ertopping all.

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper, . .
There watched for me, one June,
A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,
My poor mind's out of tune.

Only, there was a way . . . you crept
Close by the side, to dodge

[1] Medicine bottles.

Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
They styled their house "The Lodge."

What right had a lounger up their lane?
But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help,— their eyes might strain
And stretch themselves to Oes,[2]

Yet never catch her and me together,
As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labeled "Ether,"
And stole from stair to stair,

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
We loved, sir — used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was —
But then, how it was sweet!

Questions for Class Study

1. Who is speaking in this poem?
2. What question has the priest asked?
3. Describe briefly the sick-room as here suggested.
4. Describe the cottage the old man sees in memory.
5. What, in short, is the old man's answer to the priest's question?
6. Why should it be so "sad and bad and mad" to meet a lady love without her family knowing?
7. Characterize briefly the speaker in this poem.

[2] Their eyes enlarged into the shape of the letter *O*.

Up at a Villa—Down in the City

Browning is sometimes boisterously and sometimes slyly and satirically humorous. In this poem, the humor is the humor of character portrayal. The unconscious revelation of the character of the worldly Italian is one of the best things of its kind in Browning's poetry. The Italian loves the city, with its bustle and movement, its gossip and small talk, its noise, its parades, its vivid color. He despises the isolated country place, on the brow of a bare hill, where he is forced to spend his days because he has not enough money to live in the city. But what a fine time he has on the days when he can come down to the city and be a part of its noisy life! Underneath all, the poet has not left us in doubt as to the relative charms of the two situations described.

UP AT A VILLA— DOWN IN THE CITY

As Distinguished by an Italian Person of Quality

I

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

II

Something to see, by Bacchus,[1] something to hear, at least!

[1] By the god of wine. This is a common slang expression even in the speech of modern Italians.

There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;
While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than
a beast.

III

Well now, look at our villa![2] stuck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!
— I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's
turned wool.

IV

But the city, oh the city — the square with the houses!
Why?
They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something
to take the eye!
Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry[3];
You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who
hurries by;
Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the
sun gets high;
And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted
properly.[4]

V

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by
rights,
'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well
off the heights:

[2] A country residence.
[3] *Awry.* Out of line or position.
[4] Evenly and correctly.

You've the brown plowed land before, where the oxen steam and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint gray olive-trees.

VI

Is it better in May, I ask you? You've summer all at once;
In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers well,
The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

VII

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain to spout and splash!
In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine such foambows flash
On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle and pash[5]
Round the lady atop in her conch[6]— fifty gazers do not abash,
Though all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in a sort of sash.

[5] Dash.
[6] Shell.

VIII

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,
Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.
Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix i' the corn and mingle,
Or thrid[7] the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.
Late August or early September, the stunning cicala[8] is shrill,
And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous firs on the hill.
Enough of the seasons,— I spare you the months of the fever and chill.

IX

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells begin:
No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:
You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin.
By and by there's the traveling doctor gives pills, lets blood, draws teeth;
Or the Pulcinello-trumpet[9] breaks up the market beneath.

[7] Thread.

[8] The locust.

[9] "Pulcinello" is the Italian name for our English Punch. A trumpet announced the coming of the Punch and Judy shows.

At the post-office such a scene-picture — the new play, piping hot!
And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves were shot.
Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes,
And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new law of the Duke's!
Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don So-and-so,
Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome and Cicero,[10]
"And moreover," (the sonnet goes rhyming,) "the skirts of Saint Paul has reached,[11]
Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous than ever he preached."
Noon strikes,— here sweeps the procession![12] our Lady borne smiling and smart
With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords[12] stuck in her heart!
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife;
No keeping one's haunches still: it's the greatest pleasure in life.

[10] What is meant is that the priest is as much of a poet as Dante and Petrarch, as much of a story-teller as Boccaccio, as skillful a theologian as St. Jerome, and as oratorical as Cicero.

[11] "He has become almost as great a preacher as St. Paul."

[12] On Holy Thursday the image of the Virgin is borne through the streets, with the seven swords in her heart depicting her seven sorrows.

X

But bless you, it's dear — it's dear! fowls, wine, at
double the rate.
They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil
pays passing the gate[13]
It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not
the city!
Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still — ah, the
pity, the pity!
Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with
cowls and sandals,
And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding the
yellow[14] candles;
One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross
with handles,
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better
prevention of scandals:
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.
Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in
life!

Questions for Class Study

1. Where had the speaker evidently lived all his life?

2. What is his social and financial standing?

3. Is there any significance in the oath, "by Bacchus," in line 4? Why?

[13] The city levied a tax on all country produce brought in. This tax was collected at the city gate.

[14] *Yellow.* The color of candles penitents were required to carry.

4. How does he describe his country home?

5. What touch of humor is in line 10?

6. Make a list of the things he sees in the city which he does not see in the country.

7. Make a similar list of what he sees in the country but does not see in the city.

8. Explain fully the meaning of line 48.

9. In what passages are the sounds of the city interpreted to us?

10. What sly humorous hits do you find in the poem?

11. Read the poem aloud. Do you notice any differences in speed, mood, and tone quality between the portions describing the city and those describing the country? Explain.

12. After all, how do you think the author regards city life as compared with country life?

Porphyria's Lover

Porphyria's Lover is not a happy or a beautiful poem, but it is stupendous in its compact and vigorous delineation of insane jealousy. The Old Testament says that "jealousy is as cruel as the grave." Browning here shows how a light-hearted woman who could not remain true to her lover is punished by that lover in a perversion of the love he had once borne her. He is, to be sure, a thorough degenerate, but the stupendous audacity of his act of revenge has something like the vengeance of the gods about it. It surely is no puerile revenge that stops at half-measures. This is probably one of the earliest of Browning's monologues.

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me — she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me forever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:

So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the setting of the incidents narrated in this poem?
2. Describe Porphyria's actions until she is seated.
3. Why had Porphyria found it hard to remain true to her lover? Whose word only have we for this?
4. Where had she been on this night? Why did she come to the man's cottage?
5. Does this act of hers prove to the man that at last she loves him? Explain.
6. Why does he kill her when he realizes that she loves him?
7. Would you regard the man insane? If so, what has caused his insanity?
8. What is the significance of the last line?
9. Do you think the man still loved Porphyria? Is jealousy love? Is true love jealous? Give reasons for your answer.
10. Through whose eyes only have we been shown Porphyria? What evidence is there that this is the story of a madman recounting the events that unbalanced his mind?

The Laboratory

This is one of the most realistic of Browning's monologues, terribly clear and penetrating in its analysis of the character of the woman who is purchasing a poison draught to give her successful rival. Browning was more than a master in such studies of sinning humanity. If he seems needlessly realistic, remember that he was

attempting to evoke the past, with its more passionate crudities of method and means than are our present ones. The scene is in a medieval laboratory. The woman is addressing the chemist.

THE LABORATORY

Ancien Régime

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze through these faint smokes curling whitely,[1]
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy —
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?[2]

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them! — I am here.

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,— I am not in haste!
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

That in the mortar — you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,— is that poison too?

[1] The fumes of arsenic.

[2] This line was written beneath D. G. Rossetti's first water-color picture which was in illustration of this poem.

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree-basket![3]

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give,
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastille, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

Quick — is it finished? The color's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me!
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those masculine eyes,— say "no!"
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

Not that I bid you spare her the pain;
Let death be felt and the proof remain:

[3] Poisons were commonly concealed in earrings, fans, rings, and other articles, and the users inhaled or absorbed the drugs and died mysteriously.

Brand, burn up, bite into its grace —
He is sure to remember her dying face!

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee!
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it — next moment I dance at the King's!

Questions for Class Study

1. Why does the chemist use a mask?
2. Describe the scene as the poem opens. Who is speaking?
3. What is she most interested in at the outset?
4. Why do "they" think she is praying at church?
5. Explain, "I am not in haste."
6. Why is she better satisfied to be here than to "dance at the King's"?
7. Why are poisons to her "gold oozings"?
8. Which of her rivals does she hate the more? Give reasons for your answer.
9. Describe Elise. How does she compare in size with the speaker?
10. What is shown in the speaker in the kind of death she plots for her rival?
11. Why "let death be felt and the proof remain"?

12. Why is the chemist "morose"? What else does the poem reveal of his character?

13. Do you think the speaker will really poison the rival, or has this experience been a sufficient outlet for her bitter emotions? Give reasons for your answer.

A Woman's Last Word

This very charming little poem is a lovely example of the poet's tribute to woman. He pictures men and women as he finds them. If, now and then, one may be inclined to think that he finds many wicked women, it is well to turn to poems like this and to those in which he idealizes his wife and find that he believes women are good and sensible. In this poem the woman is speaking. She and her husband have quarreled, and although she feels she has had the best of the argument, she wishes to close the discussion that they may "Only sleep." The woman is thoroughly feminine in wanting the man to love her as a man can, but she must beg for the solace of a few tears before the whole matter can be ended.

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

Let's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep:
All be as before, Love,
— Only sleep!

What so wild as words are?
I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
Hawk on bough!

See the creature stalking
While we speak!
Hush and hide the talking,
Cheek on cheek!

What so false as truth is,
False to thee?
Where the serpent's tooth is
Shun the tree —

Where the apple reddens
Never pry —
Lest we lose our Edens,
Eve and I.

Be a god and hold me
With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
With thine arm!

Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought —

Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands.

That shall be to-morrow,
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight:

— Must a little weep, Love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee.

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the "creature stalking, while we speak"?
2. Where does she say she knows she has the truthful side of the argument?
3. In what way, from her viewpoint, is this truth false to her husband?
4. In the reference to Eve and Eden, recall what eating the apple was to bring to Eve. From her woman's viewpoint, does truth always bring happiness?
5. What would bring her more happiness than to gain his admission that he was in the wrong?
6. Give in your own words the substance of her surrender to her husband.
7. Why did she wish to defer this surrender until the morrow?

My Last Duchess

With inimitable art and almost with unsurpassed dramatic touches, Browning, in this poem, characterizes a figure of the Italian Renaissance. The Duke is speaking. The place is Ferrara, a famous city on the River Po, in northern Italy, ruled by the Este family. The listener is an envoy, presumably come on the mission of arranging the details of another marriage. With an air of perfect nonchalance, the Duke tells of the wife whose picture was painted by the monk, Frà Pandolf,

in a day, so jealous was he of another's presence with her. The light of joy in her eyes and the flush upon her cheek were not caused, he goes on to say, by his presence, but by anyone upon whom she chanced to look. So free was she of her light-hearted joyousness, so charming to others, that the Duke would bear it no longer. His consummate egoism in thinking she should be pleased with his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name" and care nothing for anything else fanned into flame his anger and hatred for her smiles. "I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together." However she died, whether from a broken heart or through actual murder, it was the Duke's act, and now he is ready to turn again to his devotion to art and to his arrangements for another to take her place. But the next duchess must know in advance just what the Duke requires in a duchess.

MY LAST DUCHESS

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's[1] hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

[1] Frà Pandolf and Claus of Innsbruck mentioned later are imaginary artists.

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart — how shall I say? — too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace — all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,— good! but thanked
Somehow — I know not how — as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech (which I have not) — to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"— and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set

Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
— E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Questions for Class Study

1. To whom does the Duke address the words of this poem?

2. What is implied by the word *last* as spoken by the Duke in the first line?

3. What tells us the kind of painter Frà Pandolf was?

4. Why does no one else *but* the Duke unveil this picture? Why does the Duke keep it curtained?

5. What besides the Duke's presence "called that spot of joy into the Duchess' cheek"?

6. From the words of the Duke, what do you infer as to the real character of the Duchess? Explain fully and quote passages in support of your statements.

7. Cite the passages revealing the jealousy of the Duke.

8. Explain, "I choose never to stoop."

9. What was the nature of the Duke's "commands"?

10. Explain fully the meaning of "all smiles stopped together."

11. Why does the Duke suggest a liberal dower with the next Duchess?

12. Give a summary of the characteristics of the Duchess as here revealed. Of those of the Duke.

Instans Tyrannus

The title of this poem has been taken from Horace's ode (III, iii, 1) which Gladstone translated:

> The just man in his purpose strong,
> No madding crowd can turn to wrong.
> The *forceful tyrant's* brow and word
> His firm-set spirit cannot move.

Instans Tyrannus is a study, not particularly of the actions of a tyrant, but of unreasoning, instinctive contempt and hatred. The speaker is a ruler, which helps us to explain his absolute power over the poor subject. The poem teaches that weakness may become strength when it has right and God on its side. The same thought is expressed by David in *Saul* (See line 308). A study of the same sort of unreasoning hatred as the tyrant shows here is found in *A Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister.*

INSTANS TYRANNUS[1]

I

Of the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind.

II

I struck him, he groveled of course —
For, what was his force?
I pinned him to earth with my weight
And persistence of hate:
And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
As his lot might be worse.

III

"Were the object less mean, would he stand
At the swing of my hand!
For obscurity helps him, and blots
The hole where he squats."
So, I set my five wits on the stretch[2]
To inveigle the wretch.
All in vain! Gold and jewels I threw,
Still he couched there perdue[3];
I tempted his blood and his flesh,
Hid in roses my mesh,

[1] The threatening tyrant.
[2] I did all I could.
[3] *Perdue.* Concealed.

Choicest cates[4] and the flagon's best spilth[5]:
Still he kept to his filth.

IV

Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, did I press:
Just a son or a mother to seize!
No such booty as these.
Were it simply a friend to pursue
'Mid my million or two,
Who could pay me, in person or pelf,
What he owes me himself!
No: I could not but smile through my chafe:
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,[6]
— Through minuteness, to wit.

V

Then a humor more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth
'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain.
And, "no!" I admonished myself,
"Is one mocked by an elf,
Is one baffled by toad or by rat?
The gravamen's[7] in that!

[4] Provisions, or dainties.
[5] *Spilth.* Wine.
[6] The egg of a very small insect.
[7] Grievance, or annoyance.

How the lion, who crouches to suit
His back to my foot,
Would admire[8] that I stand in debate!
But the small turns the great
If it vexes you,— that is the thing!
Toad or rat vex the king?
Though I waste half my realm to unearth
Toad or rat, 'tis well worth!"

VI

So, I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break,
Ran my fires for his sake;
Overhead, did my thunder combine
With my underground mine:
Till I looked from my labor content
To enjoy the event.

VII

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
Did I say "without friend"?
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe[9]
With the sun's self for visible boss,[10]
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest!

[8] Wonder.

[9] *Targe.* Shield.

[10] *Boss.* A projecting knob in the center of the shield.

Do you see! Just[11] my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
— So, *I* was afraid!

Questions for Class Study

1. What does the tyrant first do to the man? What next?
2. What new form of mistreatment does he try in stanza III? What is the condition of the subject as shown here?
3. What new cruelty is tried in stanza IV?
4. What psychology in the tyrant underlies his actions in stanza V?
5. Tell in your own words what happens as the climax of the poem?

Andrea del Sarto

Andrea del Sarto is one of Browning's most perfect poems. The story is based on the account given by the Italian Vasari, in his *Lives of the Italian Painters*. A portrait of Andrea and his wife hangs in the Pitti Palace, Florence, and Browning was asked to procure a copy of it for a cousin of Mrs. Browning's. Being unable to do so, he wrote the poem, embodying the items noted in Vasari's account and his own interpretation of the picture.

Andrea was the son of a tailor, hence his surname, *del Sarto*. He was born in Florence in 1486. He early

[11] *Just.* Transpose "just" to before "complete" for clearer meaning.

howed much artistic talent, and was successively apprenticed to a goldsmith, to a wood-carver, and to a painter. Before he was twenty-five, he was known all over Florence as "the faultless painter," so perfect was his technique. He fell in love with Lucrezia del Fede, the wife of a capmaker, and when the husband died he married her. The remainder of his life was one of subjection to her every whim and caprice. She was false and unprincipled, and Andrea was himself a bit weak and irresolute. She failed to appreciate his genius, and spurred him on to accept commissions only to get the money to satisfy her own never-ceasing desires. It was in part because of her that he was false to Francis I, King of France, who gave him money to buy statues and paintings in Italy. This money he spent on his wife and on her family. Because of her also he neglected his own family, who were dependent upon him and who eventually died in poverty and in misery.

In this poem Andrea says, "Ah, but man's reach should exceed his grasp, else what's a heaven for?" And Andrea failed just because his art and abilities were so perfect. Had they been less, he might have done as Rafael and Agnolo, and Leonardo, who had to call to the aid of their feeble abilities the inspiration of the soul.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

Called "The Faultless Painter"

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia! bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.

You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
Oh, I'll content him,— but to-morrow, Love!
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if — forgive now — should you let me sit
Here by the window, with your hand in mine,
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,[1]
Both of one mind, as married people use,[2]
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine, the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so —
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
— How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet —
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,

[1] Fiesole is a picturesque village on a mountain side overlooking Florence.

[2] As married people are accustomed to being.

While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there's my picture ready made,
There's what we painters call our harmony!
A common grayness silvers everything,—
All in a twilight, you and I alike
— You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone, you know) — but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example — turn your head —
All that's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak:
And that cartoon,[3] the second from the door
— It is the thing, Love! so such things should be —
Behold Madonna!— I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart

[3] *Cartoon.* Sketch or design to serve as a model for copying.

I wish for, if I ever wish so deep —
Do easily, too — when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate, 'tis easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
— Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive — you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter) — so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word —
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame

Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's[4] outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-gray,
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.
Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate[5] who died five years ago.
('Tis copied, George Vasari[6] sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art — for it gives way;
That arm is wrongly put — and there again —
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right — that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch —
Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?

[4] A mountain on whose side is located the village of Fiesole.

[5] *Urbinate.* Raphael (1483–1520), who was born in Urbino.

[6] George Vasari (1511–1574) was himself a painter and author of *Lives of Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects.*

Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you.
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think —
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you — oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that?
Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo![7]
Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems:
Perhaps not. All is as God overrules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will's somewhat — somewhat, too, the power —
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,

[7] *Agnolo.* The more correct form of Michael Angelo.

For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.[8]
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau![9]
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This, in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward!
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
And had you not grown restless . . . but I know—
'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not gray,
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.

[8] This is a reference to the episode at the court of Francis I. Andrea was paid in advance to paint a picture, but upon solicitations from his wife in Florence, he returned in haste thither and soon squandered the money.

[9] Fontainebleau was formerly the French royal palace. The town is situated thirty-five miles southeast of Paris.

How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was — to reach and stay there; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife —"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
Who, were he set to plan and execute
As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
To Rafael's!— And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here — quick, thus the line should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
Do you forget already words like those?)
If really there was such a chance so lost,—

Is, whether you're — not grateful — but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls[10] speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love,— come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me: Oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick,
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you — you, and not with me? Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The gray remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more — the Virgin's face,

[10] *Cue-owls.* Hoot-owls called in Italian *chiu*, from their cry.

Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them — that is, Michel Agnolo —
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor.
Finish the portrait out of hand — there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis!— it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
And I have labored somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures — let him try!
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance —

Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard,[11] Rafael, Agnolo, and me
To cover — the three first without a wife,
While I have mine! So — still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,— as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my love.

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the first concession Andrea makes to Lucrezia?

2. How does he show his dependence on her?

3. What did he want to do on the morrow?

4. Where has Browning used this figure — "my everybody's moon"— (line 29) and to whom?

5. Andrea speaks of the grayness over everything. Is there a "grayness" in the poem?

6. What is Andrea's mood (lines 35–40)? What season is it?

7. What does line 52 reveal as to his character?

8. What is Andrea's action in line 53? What has Lucrezia done?

9. What does Andrea think of his own ability (lines 63ff.)?

10. What does he mean in line 78?

11. Does he realize what is lacking in his own life and art (lines 79–82)? Explain.

[11] *Leonard.* Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) was an Italian artist, architect, scientist, poet and musician. He painted the "Last Supper" and the "Mona Lisa."

12. What does line 87 mean?

13. Do lines 88–96 reveal anything as to his character? What?

14. Put in your own words lines 97–98.

15. What does he reveal as to his character in lines 102–3?

16. Whom does he blame for his lack of soul (line 118)? Can this be true? Why?

17. What does he think is lacking in Lucrezia (line 126)?

18. Upon whom does he say he completely depends (line 132)? Does he really mean this? On second thought, what does he say?

19. What is your opinion of his thought in lines 137–138? Give reasons for your conclusion.

20. Explain, "And thus we *half*-men struggle" (line 140).

21. Explain, "The Roman's is the better when you pray" (line 178).

22. How did Michael Angelo compare Rafael and Andrea (lines 184–193)?

23. Just what action takes place in lines 194–7? Explain.

24. What is Lucrezia's action in line 199? In line 219?

25. What does he conclude to do in line 226? What does this show of his character?

26. Why would he like to paint a real Virgin's face (line 230)?

27. What is his conclusion? Why does he let Lucrezia go?

28. What are the best principles of art revealed in this poem?

A Grammarian's Funeral

This poem has no historical basis but it describes faithfully the love of learning in Italy during this period. "Grammarian" is used here in a broad sense, signifying a student of language and philology.

The poem is an elegy sung by one of the Grammarian's disciples, who are bearing their master to his last resting-place on the top of a high mountain. The master is a typical scholar of the Revival of Learning who sought learning for its own sake, not as a means to a practical end. He sought to *know* before he was willing to live, believing that all time and eternity were his, and that after he learned all the books had to teach, even down to the last commentary, he would be properly prepared to live in a future world.

Beginning life, strong and vigorous, handsome as Apollo, he had spent his days in pondering over ancient tomes until every vestige of youth and manly vigor had left him. But in spite of it, up to the very moment of death, "dead from his waist down," he persists in the task to which he had set his hand. To the disciples he is a hero.

Browning has grasped the spirit of the Revival of Learning and has been able to make it live for us in a fashion that almost no one else has been able to do. You should recall here *My Last Duchess*, with its exemplification of the Revival of Learning's heartlessness and love of art; and you should read *The Bishop Orders*

His Tomb at St. Praxed's to get an idea of the utter worldliness of the clergy of the time. *A Grammarian's Funeral* gives us another side of the picture.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts,[1] the vulgar thorpes,[2]
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
Cared for till cock-crow;
Look out if yonder be not day again
Rimming the rock-row[3]
That's the appropriate country; there man's thought,
Rarer, intenser,
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
Chafes in the censer.[4]
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture!

[1] Small agricultural holdings.

[2] *Villages.* This is of Danish origin and still remains in the names of such towns as Donis*thorpe* and Mable*thorpe*.

[3] *Rock-row.* Mountain ridge.

[4] The figure here is a likening of man's thought to incense burned in a censer. Hence, the mountain-top would be an appropriate place for a sepulture, from which the old man's thought might go up to God like incense.

All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
Clouds overcome it;
No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit.
Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights;
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's;
He's for the morning.
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
'Ware the beholders!
This is our master, famous, calm and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft
Safe from the weather!
He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
Singing together,
He was a man born with thy face and throat,
Lyric Apollo![5]
Long he lived nameless, how should spring take note
Winter would follow?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon!
"My dance is finished?"
No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
Make for the city!)[6]

[5] God of the sun, of medicine, music, poetry and all fine arts.

[6] These and the other words in parentheses are directions to the hearers.

He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
Over men's pity;
Left play for work, and grappled with the world
Bent on escaping:[7]
"What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled?
Show me their shaping,[8]
Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
Give!"— So, he gowned[9] him,
Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
Learned, we found him.
Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain:
"Time to taste life," another would have said,
"Up with the curtain!"
This man said rather, "Actual life comes next?
Patience a moment!
Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
Still there's the comment.
Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,
Painful or easy!
Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
Ay, nor feel queasy."[10]
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,
When he had gathered all books had to give!
Sooner, he spurned it.

[7] The world of the past.
[8] *Shaping.* Meaning.
[9] He put on the gown of the student.
[10] Nausea.

Image the whole, then execute the parts —
Fancy the fabric.
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick!

(Here's the town-gate reached: there's the market-place
Gaping before us.)
Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus!)
That before living he'd learn how to live —
No end to learning:
Earn the means first — God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.
Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes!
Live now or never!"
He said, "What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever."
Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head:
Calculus[11] racked him:
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
Tussis[12] attacked him.
"Now, master, take a little rest!"— not he!
(Caution redoubled!
Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)
Not a whit troubled,
Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon

[11] *Calculus.* Stone in the bladder or kidney.
[12] *Tussis.* A cough.

He (soul-hydroptic[13] with a sacred thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.
Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain!
Was it not great? did not he throw on God
(He loves the burthen) —
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?[14]
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by installment.
He ventured neck or nothing — heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure:
"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes!
Hence with life's pale lure!"
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it;
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's[15] soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.

[13] *Soul-hydroptic.* Thirsty.

[14] Compare *Rabbi Ben Ezra,* xxvi-xxxii.

[15] This is a reference to the English game of cricket. The hitting of a hundred runs by one man, that is, a century, is regarded as a great honor.

That, has the world here — should be need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
While he could stammer
He settled *Hoti's*[16] business — let it be!—
Properly based *Oun*[16] —
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,[16]
Dead from the waist down.
Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
Hail to your purlieus,[17]
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews!
Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there:
This man decided not to Live but Know —
Bury this man there?
Here — here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,

[16] The Greek particles have been the subject of much learned discussion.

[17] Outskirts or borders.

Leave him — still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.

Questions for Class Study

1. There is a Hebrew legend that when men pray on earth their prayers ascend as incense to God, and that the angel Sandalphon receives them in a censer and offers them as a sweet perfume to the Lord. (Read Longfellow's poem "Sandalphon.") Is there any reason for you to believe that Browning may have had this legend in mind when he wrote lines 9–12? Give reasons for your answer.

2. The reference in lines 13–16 is to the fact that many of the famous Italian cities were built for better security, like ancient Athens, on mountain-tops; in the plains below the crops were raised. The cities, therefore, were places of culture; the plains were "unlettered." Is it, then, a barren mountain on which the old man is to be buried (see lines 25–26)? Explain. What other reference tells us that the mountain is peopled and built upon to its summit?

3. What traits in the disciples do lines 25–26 show us? To whom is the disciple speaking in lines 27–28?

4. What is the reference to Lyric Apollo in line 34?

5. Did the disciples come to him when he was a youth? How, then, did they know what he looked like when he was young? Do you think their description is mere idealizing? Give your reasons.

6. What answer does the scholar give to the man

who would tell him he ought to live now? When does he mean really to live?

7. What does he believe of the future life?

8. What fine quality does the disciple see in the scholar in lines 109–110?

9. Compare the man of little ambition and vision and him of large ambition in lines 113–124.

10. Give in your own words the central thought of this poem.

STUDIES IN CHARACTER

Emphasis on Beliefs and Opinions

The three poems that follow, though each is named for some person, most unmistakably subordinate the development of character and put the emphasis on the beliefs the characters are made to express. Thus, they form a rather sure basis on which we may formulate some idea of what Browning himself thought. Along with the group of poems that follows them, they give us the best idea possible of Browning's thinking concerning life and death. How bravely and courageously he faces life, and how hopefully and trustingly he faces death! You will see also that he regards life as a time of activity and vigorous labor, and that he conceives of the life beyond the grave as no less a period of intense activity, crowning life and its labors with renewed chances to complete and make perfect the imperfections of this earthly existence.

The Guardian Angel

Browning and his wife lived for a time, in 1847, in the city of Ancona in Italy on the coast of the Adriatic. On three occasions, they visited the church of St. Augustine, at Fano, a coast city thirty miles distant. There they loved to sit and enjoy a certain picture which he has described and interpreted for us in this poem. The

picture is that of an angel standing with protecting wings by a kneeling child, the left arm gently embracing the child and the right touching the tiny hands folded in prayer. The child is looking upward towards the heavens from which cherubs are looking down. In a very fine spiritual sense, the poet longs to exchange places with the child so that he may view the world with the eyes of pure faith.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL[1]

A Picture at Fano

I

Dear and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave
That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!
Let me sit all the day here, that when eve
Shall find performed thy special ministry,
And time come for departure, thou, suspending
Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,
Another still to quiet and retrieve.

II

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,
From where thou standest now, to where I gaze.
— And suddenly my head is covered o'er
With those wings, white above the child who prays
Now on that tomb — and I shall feel thee guarding
Me, out of all the world; for me, discarding
Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes its door.

[1] In Italian, *L'Angelo Custode.*

III

I would not look up thither past thy head
Because the door opes, like that child, I know,
For I should have thy gracious face instead,
Thou bird of God![2] And wilt thou bend me low
Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

IV

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My head beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing,
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

V

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And know this is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

[2] *Bird of God.* This expression is frequently used to denote angels. It was taken directly from Dante's *Purgatory,* Canto V.

VI

Guercino[3] drew this angel I saw teach
(Alfred,[4] dear friend!) — that little child to pray,
Holding the little hands up, each to each
Pressed gently,— with his own head turned away
Over the earth where so much lay before him
Of work to do, tho' heaven was opening o'er him,
And he was left at Fano by the beach.

VII

We were at Fano, and three times we went
To sit and see him in his chapel there,
And drink his beauty to our soul's content
— My angel with me too: and since I care
For dear Guercino's fame (to which in power
And glory comes this picture for a dower,
Fraught with a pathos so magnificent) —

VIII

And since he did not work thus earnestly
At all times, and has else endured some wrong —
I took one thought his picture struck from me,
And spread it out, translating it to song.

[3] *Guercino.* Giovanni Francesco Barbieri Guercino was born at Cento, near Bologna, in 1590. He was a contemporary of Raphael and painted 106 large altar pieces and 144 other pictures. The name *Guercino* means the *squint-eyed,* and was applied to him because of a physical defect which caused frequent squinting.

[4] *Alfred.* Alfred Domett, an early friend of Browning, living at that time in New Zealand.

My love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?
How rolls the Wairoa[5] at your world's far end?
This is Ancona,[6] yonder is the sea.

Questions for Class Study

1. Just what and where was *The Guardian Angel?*
2. Who is speaking in the poem?
3. What *child* is meant in line 2? Who is "another child" in line 6?
4. What tomb is referred to in the second stanza?
5. For what does the speaker's heart most yearn? Explain.
6. Describe the picture as revealed in the words of the speaker.
7. Explain "Thou Bird of God."
8. What mood is shown in stanza III?
9. Explain the meaning of stanza IV.
10. In what way would earth and sea and skies then seem different?
11. What is the meaning of lines 33–4?
12. Answer the question in line 35.
13. What was the "pathos so magnificent" in the picture?
14. What tells us of the way in which this picture impressed the poet and his wife?
15. What characteristics of the painter, Guercino, are here given?

[5] *Wairoa.* A county on the North Island, New Zealand, where Alfred Domett lived. Through it flows a river of the same name.

[6] *Ancona.* A picturesque city on the Adriatic in central Italy. It was for a time the home of the Brownings.

16. What is the message Browning wants us to get from the picture?

Abt Vogler

This poem is based upon Browning's conception of the thinking of George Joseph Vogler (1749–1814), a priest and musical composer who had long arms and enormous hands that could stretch two octaves easily. He invented the *orchestrion*, a compact organ, which had four key-boards of five octaves each and a pedal board of thirty-six keys. Some have regarded Vogler as a genius while others have thought him an impostor. He opened schools of music at Mannheim, Stockholm, and at Darmstadt, where Meyerbeer and Weber became his pupils.

Abt Vogler represents the musician as completing an extemporaneous composition on the *orchestrion*, and leaning over his instrument, is convulsed with tears of excitement at the feat he has just performed. In his exaltation, he utters the wish that the music which has just come from his soul could somehow be materialized as a beautiful palace, reaching from earth to heaven, and inhabited by the beautiful presence of choice spirits of past, present, and future. Then he changes the figure, and conceives that if his art had been that of the painter or of the poet, the conception that he had created would have been there to see or to hear. But, he concludes, although this would indeed have been "art in obedience to laws," where his music "is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can," it is like the sounds spoken by God himself, which when they are

mingled, produce perfect harmonies and create utterly new things.

The feeling of exultation past, he wonders if he can do the same thing again, and, back to earth now, he turns to God as the assurance that what he has done "shall live as before," because it was "good" and "the evil is null." Then, expanding his thought to larger spheres, he concludes that "All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist"; life's imperfections shall be made perfect in the life to come. Anguish and suffering and waiting are but to help perfect the round of our completed characters, which shall be realized in another life. Finally, he gropes over his keys till he finds the "C Major of this life," and is content to go struggling that he may again reach the heights.

ABT VOGLER

After he has been Extemporizing upon the Musical Instrument of his Invention

I

Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon willed[1]
Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,

[1] There was a Hebrew legend to the effect that King Solomon had control over the spirits of the earth and air by invoking the name of Jehovah, engraved upon a seal.

Man, brute, reptile, fly,— alien of end and of aim,
Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed,—
Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name,
And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princes he loved!

II

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!
Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart[2] now and now combine,
Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down to hell,
Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace well,
Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

III

And another would mount and march, like the excellent minion he was,
Ay, another and yet another, one crowd but with many a crest,

[2] Separate.

Raising my rampired[3] walls of gold as transparent as glass,
Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest:
For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,
When a great illumination surprises a festal night —
Outlining round and round Rome's dome[4] from space to spire)
Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was in sight.

IV

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match man's birth,
Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the earth,
As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale the sky:
Novel splendors burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering star;
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.

[3] *Rampired.* Fortified.

[4] St. Peter's dome in Rome used to be illuminated for certain festivals.

V

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare and glow,
Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,[5]
Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow.
Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;
Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body and gone,
But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new:
What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
And what is,— shall I say, matched both? for I was made perfect too.

VI

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,
All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,
All through music and me! For think, had I painted the whole,
Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonderworth:
Had I written the same, made verse — still, effect proceeds from cause,

[5] *Protoplast.* Original mould.

Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale
is told;
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,
Painter and poet are proud, in the artist list enrolled:—

VII

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them, and, lo,
they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to
man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound,
but a star.
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is naught:
It is everywhere in the world — loud, soft, and all is
said.
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and
bow the head!

VIII

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come
too slow;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he
feared,
That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was
to go.
Never to be again! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better, perchance: is this your comfort
to me?

To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God: ay, what was shall be.

IX

Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.[6]

X

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,

[6] This line contains the essence of much of Browning's teaching which he expounds in the last three stanzas. This doctrine may be called "the glory of the imperfect."

When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by and by.

XI

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fullness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his says, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know.

XII

Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,— yes,
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;

Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-
place is found,
The C Major[7] of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.

Questions for Class Study

1. What does Abt Vogler wish his music to be like in stanzas I and II?

2. Who are the creatures referred to in stanzas II and III?

3. What personages occupy the palace his music builds?

4. What comparison does he make between the poet and painter and the composer of music?

5. What assurance does he find that he can do the same thing again that he has already done?

6. Explain fully the meaning of lines 69–70.

7. Explain lines 71–2.

8. Interpret in your own words the meaning of stanza X.

9. Interpret the meaning of stanza XII in the terms of everyday speech.

10. How does this musical interpretation of life compare with the best Biblical, literary, or other art interpretations?

11. Select what to you are the choicest passages and interpret them clearly. What is the central teaching of the poem?

[7] This is the keynote of the simplest musical scale. The important thing then is that Abt Vogler reaches for the "C Major" of this life.

Rabbi Ben Ezra

Rabbi Ben Ezra (1090–1168), an eminent philosopher, physician, astronomer and poet, was born in Toledo, in Spain, of a very poor family. He traveled in the Holy Land, Egypt, Arabia and possibly Persia and India. He also lived for some time in Italy and visited England.

This poem is said to reflect very accurately the teachings of this philosopher. Browning represents the old master as speaking to a younger person. A complete view of life, he says, must include both age and youth; even more—a complete view of existence sees this life as an imperfect aspiration to achieve what must be completed in another and fuller life, where earth's hopes and aspirations will be fulfilled.

Rabbi Ben Ezra tells his young friend that the glory of life is just in the fact that it is imperfect, but that there is an immortal hope for a completing and perfecting future. Old age, therefore, instead of being the period of decay of powers of mind and body should be and is the period of reaping what youth has sown. The pleasures of youth, which are not to be despised, are no greater than are the pleasures of age, when a man may begin to see the ingathering of the harvest of his good deeds.

The conflict between flesh and spirit is less as age comes on with its greater powers, which have come as the result of the conflict itself. Obstacles and suffering are therefore necessary. Success in life is to be measured, not by what we have actually achieved, but by what we have hoped and wished to achieve and have

failed in achieving. To justify this doctrine, there must be the unflinching faith that was so characteristic of Browning, that there is a future life of great activity, reaping the sowing of this life. In the close of the poem he uses the figure of the potter's wheel (Isaiah, lxiv, 8 and Jeremiah, xviii, 3–6) to illustrate his conception of life.

RABBI BEN EZRA

I

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in his hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

II

Not that,[1] amassing flowers,
Youth sighed "Which rose make ours,
Which lily leave and then as best recall?"
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned "Nor Jove,[2] nor Mars;[3]

[1] The meaning of stanzas II and III is, "I do not remonstrate with youth because it desires so much that it cannot have. The very fact that youth is the period of doubting and questioning is proof that it is superior."

[2] *Jove.* Jupiter, the king of the gods and ruler of the universe.

[3] *Mars.* God of war.

Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends
them all!"

III

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men;
Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-
crammed beast?[4]

V

Rejoice we are allied
To that which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of his tribes that take, I must
believe.

[4] Merely material pleasures, he says, soon have their end. Are animals when they are well-fed troubled with cares and doubts?

VI

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

VII

For thence — a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks —
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

VIII

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man, propose this test —
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use:
I own the Past profuse[5]

[5] The Rabbi means to say his own youth was vigorous in the power and delight of the senses. But this is not enough. Power must be completed by love.

Of power each side, perfection every turn:
Eyes, ears took in their dole,[6]
Brain treasured up the whole;
Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and learn"?

X

Not once beat "Praise be thine!
I see the whole design,
I, who saw power, see now Love perfect too:
Perfect I call thy plan:
Thanks that I was a man!
Maker, remake, complete,— I trust what thou shalt do!"

XI

For pleasant is this flesh;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest:
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute,— gain most, as we did best!

XII

Let us not always say
"Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"

[6] Share.

XIII

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:[7]
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a God though in the germ.

XIV

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and new;
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armor to indue.[8]

XV

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold;
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame:
Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

XVI

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts

[7] End.

[8] *Indue.* Put on.

The deed off, calls the glory from the gray:
A whisper from the west
Shoots —"Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

XVII

So, still within this life,
Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main,
That acquiescence vain:
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

XVIII

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made;
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age: wait death nor be afraid!

XX[9]

Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past!
Was I the world arraigned,[10]
Were they my soul disdained,[10]
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive,
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: We all surmise,
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

[9] *Stanza XX.* It is enough if man has learned in this life what Right and Good and God are.

[10] Age, with its greater knowledge than youth, can decide between me whom the world condemned or them whom my soul disdained.

XXIII[11]

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work" must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
This I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

[11] *Stanzas XXIII, XXIV, and XXV.* The world measures success by the amount of achievement. But this is not the measure of success; the instincts, the blind gropings, the "purposes unsure"—these "swell the man's amount" in God's total.

XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor![12] and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

XXVII

Fool! All that is at all
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII[13]

He fixed thee 'mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

[12] In the metaphor of the potter's wheel, God is the Potter, Time the Wheel, and Man the Clay.

[13] *Stanza XXVIII.* God placed us in the midst of change. Time cannot be stopped or turned back; the wheel moves irrevocably, and its value is in shaping us and completing our characters.

XXIX

What though the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
What though, about thy rim,
Skull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

XXX

Look thou not down but up!
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips aglow!
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou
with earth's wheel?[14]

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who moldest men;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I,— to the wheel of life,
With shapes and colors rife,
Bound dizzily,— mistake my end, to slake Thy
thirst:

XXXII

So take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!

[14] The completed cup (in heaven) is turned no more on the wheel. What need has man now for time? Eternity is his.

190 My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting of this poem. Who is speaking?

2. Explain the meaning in the opening paragraph. What is the meaning of, "Youth shows but half"?

3. Of what value does the Rabbi find the pleasures of youth?

4. What thought is emphasized in stanza V?

5. Why "welcome each rebuff"?

6. Does he intimate that we can do without the body in the development of the soul? How does flesh help soul (stanza VIII)?

7. What is the thought of stanzas IX and X?

8. In what particular is man higher than the brute (stanza XIII)?

9. How do the deeds of the past help us face the future (stanza XVII)?

10. What thought is emphasized in stanza XIX?

11. According to the Rabbi, how can we evaluate the conflicting opinions of men?

12. Why can we not live just in the present (stanzas XXVI and XXVII)?

13. What is "this dance of plastic circumstance"?

14. What is the use of the Cup? Explain.

15. Write a careful summary of Browning's teaching in this poem.

Saul

In *Saul* Browning reaches the high point in his religious teaching. The poem is based upon the incident narrated in *I Samuel*, xvi, 14–23, and for its main features follows the account closely. The theology is even more than merely Christian, being a mingling of what Browning himself found best in Hebraism, in Christianity, and in the modern ideas concerning Christianity.

David comes to Saul in his tent to play on his harp and rouse him from the melancholia which had seized upon him. David is met by Abner, the captain of Saul's host, who tells him why he has been sent for. The winsome young poet and musician prays first and then enters Saul's tent, whom he finds in the agony of his struggle, standing against the tent-pole. He tunes his harp and plays the simple songs the peasants play to call the animals and birds. Then he plays the "help-songs," the songs sung at the great events in the life of the Hebrews, the song of the reapers, the marriage song, the death song, the song of the builders, the song of the Temple services. This last brings a groan from Saul, who rouses himself slightly from his lethargy.

David waits an instant to see what the effect will be, then he improvises a song celebrating the joy of mere physical living, reminding Saul of the vigor and strength of his powerful and athletic frame, of the deeds he has done since first he set out with his father's and mother's blessing, of his prowess until he had conquered and won the hearts of all his people. The singer pauses, then

calls the name "Saul!" At sound of his name, the mighty monarch stirs and moves until he sets quivering the whole tent. His eyes assume the old lustre, there comes back the memory of his mighty deeds of the past, some of the old strength of body and limb. Alive, yet not alive, he awaits the next song of the singer.

David wonders, now that Saul shows the semblance of living, with what song he can hold the life he has brought back. "Then fancies grew rife"; he recalls the old longings of his own heart as he lay with his sheep beneath the stars on the hillsides, the longing to know something of the mystery of the life above in relation to the life below, and he sings again, urging Saul to put trust in something more than mere physical being, to learn that even in nature it is not the mere outward semblance of things that counts, but the spirit within.

Saul becomes the old kingly figure. He uprears his great frame to its full height. In spite of his sins and his misdeeds, the ancient glory is his again. David becomes aware that he sits at the feet of his king, his small body encircled by the great limbs of the warrior. Saul reaches down, smooths the boy's hair, lifts his face to his, to find, if he may, if there is truth there and honesty, or if the music is mere flattery. Then David, looking into the sin-marked face of King Saul, without harp or song, discovers that "All's love, yet all's law." He yearns to restore Saul, but realizes that only "a Hand like this hand shall throw open the gates of new life to thee (Saul)." Where man's weakness fails, the strength of the Almighty avails. This is the "new law" to which all creation bows.

Saul and *Abt Vogler* are regarded by many as the most artistic literary creations interpreting life and its laws through the power of music.

SAUL

I

Said Abner,[1] "At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and did kiss his cheek.
And he: "Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit[2] have ended their strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.

[1] Abner was Saul's chief captain.

[2] The melancholia from which Saul was suffering was thought to have been caused by an evil spirit within its victim.

II

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!"

III

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered and gone,
That extends to the second inclosure, I groped my way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts[3] fly open. Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid
But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!" And no voice replied.
At the first I saw naught but the blackness: but soon I descried

[3] Tent flaps.

A something more black than the blackness — the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent roof, showed Saul.

IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the center, that goes to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time,— so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.

V

Then I tuned my harp,— took off the lilies we twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide — Those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.

They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,— so blue and so far!

VI

— Then, the tune for which quails on the cornland will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another; and then, what has weight
To set the quick jerboa[4] a-musing outside his sand house —
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.

VII

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great hearts expand

[4] *Jerboa.* A kind of jumping rat that has very long hind legs.

And grow one in the sense of this world's life.— And then, the last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey — "Bear, bear him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm seeds not here
To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.[5]
Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!"— And then, the glad chaunt
Of the marriage,— first go the young maidens; next, she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.— And then, the great march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch
Naught can break; who shall harm them, our friends? — Then, the chorus intoned
As the Levites[6] go up to the altar in glory enthroned.
But I stopped here; for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban at once with a start

[5] The litter on which a corpse is placed. In country places in England the body is borne to the grave in this manner.

[6] Priests of the tribe of Levi.

All its lordly male-sapphires,[7] and rubies courageous at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,
As I sang: —

IX

"Oh, our manhood's prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh[8] steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.

[7] *Male-sapphires.* Superior sapphires.
[8] Locust-flesh is still used as food in some eastern countries.

How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword thou didst guard
When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious reward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as men sung
The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear her faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness, 'Let one more attest,
I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime, and all was for best?'
Then they sung through their tears in strong triumph, not much, but the rest.
And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working whence grew
Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit strained true:
And the friends of thy boyhood — that boyhood of wonder and hope,
Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's scope,—
Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is thine;
And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head combine!
On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and rage (like the throe

That, a-work in the rock, helps its labor and lets the gold go)
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning them,— all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature — King Saul!"

X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,— heart, hand, harp, and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for — as when, dare I say,
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains through its array,
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot —"Saul!" cried I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul, who hung propped
By the tent's cross support in the center, was struck by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,— leaves grasp of the sheet?

Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down
to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet,
your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages
untold —
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each
furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest — all
hail, there they are!
— Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold
the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the
green on his crest
For their food in the ardors of summer. One long
shudder thrilled
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and
was stilled
At the King's self left standing before me, released
and aware.
What was gone, what remained? All to traverse
'twixt hope and despair.
Death was past, life not come: so he waited. Awhile
his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant, forth-
with to remand
To their place what new objects should enter: 'twas
Saul as before.
I looked up, and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was
hurt any more

Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean — a sun's slow decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely; so, arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

XI

What spell or what charm,
(For awhile there was trouble within me) what next should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him? Song filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye,
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they put by?
He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets me praise life,
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the sheep

Fed in silence — above, the one eagle wheeled slow
as in sleep;
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that
might lie
'Neath his ken,[9] though I saw but the strip 'twixt the
hill and the sky:
And I laughed —"Since my days are ordained to be
passed with my flocks,
Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains
and the rocks,
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image
the show
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly
shall know!
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the
courage that gains
And the prudence that keeps what men strive for!"
And now these old trains
Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so, once
more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus —

XIII

"Yea, my King,"
I began —"thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts
that spring
From the mere mortal life held in common by man
and by brute:
In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul
it bears fruit.

[9] Sight.

Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,— how its stem trembled first
Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then safely outburst
The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when these too, in turn
Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet more was to learn,
E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our dates shall we slight,
When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care for the plight
Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so! stem and branch
Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine shall stanch
Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!
By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy
More indeed, than at first when inconscious, the life of a boy.[10]
Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun
Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him, though tempests efface,

[10] Read "Thou didst enjoy" before "the life of a boy."

Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must
everywhere trace
The results of his past summer-prime,— so, each ray
of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over,
shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till they
too give forth
A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the South
and the North
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse
in the past!
But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:
As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her
height,
So with man — so his power and his beauty forever
take flight.
No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look
forth o'er the years!
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin
with the seer's!
Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his
tomb — bid arise
A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square, till,
built to the skies,
Let it mark where the great First King slumbers:
whose fame would ye know?
Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record
shall go
In great characters cut by the scribe,— Such was
Saul, so he did;

With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid,—
For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they shall spend
(See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise, and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,— the statesman's great word
Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds[11] grazing each other when prophet-winds rave:
So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God
190 that thou art!"

XIV

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst grant me, that day,
And, before it, not seldom hast granted thy help to essay,
Carry on and complete an adventure,— my shield and my sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my word,—
Still be with me, who then at the summit of human endeavor

[11] *Paper-reeds,* Papyrus from which the Egyptians made paper.

And scaling the highest, man's thought could, gazed hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me — till, mighty to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance — God's throne from man's grave!
Let me tell out my tale to its ending — my voice to my heart
Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last night I took part,
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with my sheep,
And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep!
For I wake in the gray dewy covert, while Hebron[12] upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron[13] retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV

I say then,— my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and, ever more strong,
Made a proffer of good to console him — he slowly resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted the swathes

[12] *Hebron.* A town near Jerusalem.
[13] *Kidron.* A brook near Jerusalem.

Of his turban, and see — the huge sweat that his
210 countenance bathes,
He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory,— ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop, till, stayed by the pile
Of his armor and war-cloak and garments, he leaned there awhile,
And sat out my singing,— one arm round the tent prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack — till I
220 touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all time to the man patient there;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up to know

If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: through my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with kind power —
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.
Thus held he me there with his great eyes that scrutinized mine —
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where was the sign?
I yearned —"Could I help thee, my father, inventing a bliss,
I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;
I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,
As this moment,— had love but the warrant, love's heart to dispense!"

XVI

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more — no song more! outbroke —

XVII

"I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke:

I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain
And pronounced on the rest of his handwork — returned him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw:
I report, as a man may of God's work — all's love, yet all's law.
Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each faculty tasked
To perceive him has gained an abyss, where a dew-drop was asked.
Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom laid bare.
Have I forethought? how purblind,[14] how blank, to the Infinite Care!
Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes,— and perfection, no more and no less,
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.
And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet.
Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity known,

[14] Wholly blind.

I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of
my own.
There's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hood-
wink,
I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I
think),
Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I
worst
E'en the Giver in one gift.— Behold, I could love if
I durst!
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may
o'ertake
God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain for
love's sake.
— What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when
doors great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the
hundredth appall?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the
greatest of all?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it?
Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the creator,— the end,
what began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this
man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet
alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will,
much less power,

To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvelous dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering[15] the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest),
These good things being given, to go on, and give one more, the best?
Aye, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height
This perfection,— succeed with life's dayspring, death's minute of night?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now,— and bid
280 him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life,— a new harmony yet
To be run and continued, and ended — who knows? — or endure!
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to make sure;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

[15] Enclosing.

XVIII

"I believe it! 'Tis thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive:
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.
All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my prayer
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
From thy will stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread Sabaoth:[16]
I will? — the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth
To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare
Think but lightly of such impuissance?[17] What stops my despair?
This;—'tis not what man *does* which exalts him, but what man *would do!*
See the King — I would help him, but cannot, the wishes fall through.
Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would — knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!

[16] Armies.
[17] Impotence.

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou
— so wilt thou!
So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown —
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!
As thy love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.
'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

XIX

I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.

There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware:
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as struggglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news —
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted not
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth —
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the gray of the hills;
In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind-thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling still,

Though averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and chill
That rose heavily as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent — he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-bowers:
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices —"E'en so, it is so!"

Questions for Class Study

1. Who is speaking as the poem opens?
2. Who was Abner? What did he tell David?
3. What is the Bible story upon which the poem is based (I Samuel xvi, 14–23)?
4. Describe Saul as David first found him.
5. Why had David's harp been twined with lilies?
6. What tunes did David play in succession?
7. Explain the meaning of lines 47–8.
8. What was the first song that moved Saul? Explain.
9. What shows the degree to which Saul was moved at first (stanza VIII)?
10. Stanza IX is an attempt to interpret something of the early career of Saul. Through what experiences had he passed?

11. Explain "Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow."

12. Just how did Saul respond to the call of his name? Explain, "Death was past, life not come."

13. What is the song that at last rouses Saul? What does this show of his character?

14. What inspires David's song in stanza XIII? What is the substance of that song?

15. What inspires his last song? What is the central teaching of that song?

16. What is the effect on David of the last song?

17. Give in your own words a clear-cut summary of the poem and tell what parts of it impress you most.

POEMS EXPRESSING INTIMATE OPINIONS

Although some of the thoughts expressed in the poems that follow have been already seen in other poems, this brief section has been included because the poems it contains are more direct in their statement than are the others. In these we can feel that Browning himself is unmistakably speaking, and though they do not contribute greatly to our further knowledge of his thinking, they do confirm what we have already learned.

The Lost Leader

The Lost Leader has been taken as applying to the poet William Wordsworth, whose abandonment of the Liberal cause was matter of great regret to all lovers of democracy and freedom. When Browning was asked if he had Wordsworth in mind, he disclaimed all such direct intention and said that he had in mind any person who had given up a good cause for what he conceived to be merely material rewards. Let us regard the poem simply as a character study such as Browning so much loved to write.

THE LOST LEADER

I

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband[1] to stick in his coat —

[1] Decoration.

Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags — were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,— they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
— He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II

We shall march prospering,— not through his presence;
Songs may inspirit us,— not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done,— while he boasts his quiescence,[2]
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation, and pain,

[2] Inactivity.

Forced praise on our part — the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him — strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

Questions for Class Study

1. For what rewards had this leader forsaken a good cause?
2. For whom had he hitherto been a "pattern"?
3. What great souls had espoused the cause?
4. What expressions does the poet apply to this deed of the lost leader?
5. Why cannot the leader re-join his party?
6. What was Browning's thought in writing the poem?

Memorabilia

Memorabilia, which means "Things Remembered," is said to have been inspired by Browning's overhearing in a bookstore a man casually remark that he had once seen Shelley and had spoken to him. The casual indifference of the man stirs Browning to a remembrance of the inspiration Shelley had been to him since, as a boy, he had first learned to know and love the poet through a pirated edition of his poems which his mother had purchased for him. Shelley, whom Browning called "Sun-Treader," is a sufficient inspiration for the beautiful figure of the eagle's feather, which dropped

out of the sky one day as he was crossing a barren moor. That one spot was made memorable for him by the incident and everything else was forgotten. Thus, the casual remark of the stranger about Shelley was to Browning so great an event as to cause him to forget everything else connected with the incident.

MEMORABILIA

I

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,
  And did he stop and speak to you,
And did you speak to him again?
  How strange it seems, and new!

II

But you were living before that,
  And also you are living after;
And the memory I started at —
  My starting moves your laughter!

III

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own
  And a certain use in the world, no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
  'Mid the blank miles round about:

IV

For there I picked up on the heather
  And there I put inside my breast
A molted feather,[1] an eagle feather!
  Well, I forget the rest.

[1] A feather cast off in the process of developing new feathers.

Questions for Class Study

1. Give briefly the setting of this poem.
2. Why did the speaker "start" at the mention of Shelley?
3. Why does only a hand-breadth of the moor shine alone?
4. Of what other experience of Browning's is his experience in the moor a symbol?
5. In what sense did the eagle feather remind the poet of Shelley?

Why I Am a Liberal

This question "Why I am a Liberal" was asked several leaders of English thought as a contribution to a certain periodical. Browning answered in the form of a poem.

We have little directly in Browning's poetry itself to indicate how he felt on political matters; therefore, this poem is especially valuable because it states his position unequivocally.

WHY I AM A LIBERAL

"Why?" Because all I haply can and do,
All that I am now, all that I hope to be,—
Whence comes it save from fortune setting free
Body and soul the purpose to pursue,
God traced for both? If fetters, not a few,
Of prejudice, convention, fall from me,
These shall I bid men — each in his degree
Also God-guided — bear, and gayly too?

But little do or can the best of us:
That little is achieved thro' Liberty.
Who then dares hold, emancipated thus,
His fellow shall continue bound? not I,
Who live, love, labor freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

Questions for Class Study

1. Explain the meaning of the question and the answer in the first four lines.
2. What "fetters" are mentioned? Explain each.
3. What is meant by "Liberty"?
4. What is the point to the second stanza?
5. Summarize in your own words Browning's reasons for being a Liberal.

"De Gustibus—"

De Gustibus expresses Browning's undying love for the land in which he spent so many happy years. The title is part of the Latin proverb, *De gustibus non est disputandum*, meaning "There is no disputing when tastes are involved." Its application to the poem is obvious.

Concerning his taste for Italy in comparison with the taste of him who loves the tree-shadowed countryside of England there can be no dispute. The business is not anybody's business. One man merely prefers trees, whereas the other (Browning) prefers the hills of the Apennines. In an unusual description he places England and Italy in contrast so far as their natural scenery is

concerned. This poem is unusual in that it is one of the very few in which Browning describes natural scenery for itself alone, and not as a background for human action. The last words were suggested by the saying of Queen Mary when Calais was lost to the French. They are carved in Italian on the walls of the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice where Browning died.

"DE GUSTIBUS—"

I

Your ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
(If our loves remain)
In an English lane,
By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.
Hark, those two in the hazel coppice —
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,
Making love, say,—
The happier they!
Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
And let them pass, as they will too soon,
With the beanflower's boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June!

II

What I love best in all the world
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.[1]
Or look for me, old fellow of mine,

[1] *Apennine.* A range of mountains running in a north-south direction and forming the backbone of Italy.

(If I get my head from out the mouth
O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,
And come again to the land of lands) —
In a sea-side house to the farther South,
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,
And one sharp tree — 'tis a cypress — stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. For, what expands
Before the house, but the great opaque
Blue breadth of sea without a break?
While, in the house, forever crumbles
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles
Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,
And says there's news to-day — the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,[2]
Goes with his Bourbon[3] arm in a sling:
— She hopes they have not caught the felons.
Italy, my Italy!
Queen Mary's saying serves for me —
(When fortune's malice
Lost her, Calais)[4]
Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, "Italy."

[2] *Liver-wing.* The right wing of a bird; hence the right arm.
[3] The Bourbon family at one time held the throne of Naples.
[4] A French port on the English Channel opposite Dover.

Such lovers old are I and she:
So it always was, so shall ever be!

Questions for Class Study

1. If you will read the first line of the poem with emphasis on "your" and supply "after death" at the close of the second line, you will get the idea more clearly. Whom is Browning addressing? Why does he call him "you lover of trees"?
2. Describe the Italian scenery that Browning loved.
3. What does Browning mean in lines 43–44?
4. Give in your own words what you think Browning intended to reveal in the poem.

The Boy and the Angel

This poem tells us of Theocrite, a poor Italian boy, who ever sang at his humble task. Morning, noon, and night he sang his *Laudate*, "Praise God." As he prayed well and loved God, so he worked well and served his master faithfully. The monk Blaise, overhearing the simple praise, declared to the boy that he was heard as well as if he were the Pope at Rome. But Theocrite said, "Would God I might praise Him in the great way and die." That night Theocrite disappeared. God missed the simple human praise. Then the archangel Gabriel descended to earth, took the young craftsman's place, and did God's will on earth as he had done it in heaven. What follows is beautifully told in this poem in which there is worked out the thought of a famous line from the song in *Pippa Passes:* "All service ranks

the same with God." The poem was first published in *Hood's Magazine*, in 1844, and was doubtless based on one of many legends of early Roman and later Mediæval life telling how kings and princes, or even angels and saints, exchanged places with those in the humblest walks of life.

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

Morning, evening, noon, and night,
"Praise God!" sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he labored, long and well;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever at each period,
He stopped and sang, "Praise God!"

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, "Well done;
I doubt not thou art heard, my son:

"As well as if thy voice to-day
Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

"This Easter day, the Pope at Rome
Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, "Would God that I
Might praise Him that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in heaven, "Nor day nor night
Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well;

And morning, evening, noon, and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew:
The man put off the stripling's hue:

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay:

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

(He did God's will; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, "A praise is in mine ear;
There is no doubt in it, no fear:

"So sing old worlds, and so
New worlds that from my footstool go.

"Clearer loves sound other ways:
I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'Twas Easter day: he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite:

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer:

And rising from the sickness drear,
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

"I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell,
And set thee here; I did not well.

"Vainly I left my angel-sphere,
Vain was thy dream of many a year.

"Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped —
Creation's chorus stopped!

"Go back and praise again
The early way, while I remain.

"With that weak voice of our disdain,
Take up creation's pausing strain.

"Back to the cell and poor employ:
Resume the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.

One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side.

Questions for Class Study

1. What in the opening stanzas tells us of the character of Theocrite?
2. What tells us especially of his devotion and faithful service?
3. What did the monk Blaise suggest to him?
4. What sincere wish did Theocrite express? Why?
5. What then happened to him?
6. Who took the boy's place?
7. Give God's interpretation of the new situation, as here poetically given.
8. What did Gabriel discover in Rome?
9. How had Theocrite risen to so lofty a place?
10. What is Gabriel's explanation of the situation?
11. Why does he say, "I did not well"?
12. What then happened to Theocrite?
13. Explain the distinction between *vanished* and *died*.
14. Give in your own words what you regard as the real meaning of the poem.

Prospice

Prospice, pronounced prŏs′-pĭ-kā, means "Look forward." It is one of the most vigorous poems on death in the language. Written shortly after his wife's death, it expresses Browning's defiance of death and the sure certainty he has that he will meet her again. He said

at one time, "I know I shall meet my dearest friends again." Near the end of his life, he said to some friends: "Death! Death! It is this harping on death I despise so much,— this idle and cowardly as well as ignorant harping. Why should we not change like everything else? For myself I deny death as an end of anything. Never say of me that I am dead."

PROSPICE

Fear death? — to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so — one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers,
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness, and cold.

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

Questions for Class Study

1. What probably called forth this poem?
2. Who is the "Arch Fear"?
3. Explain the meaning of lines 13–16.
4. In what sense are pain, darkness, and cold "glad life's arrears"?
5. Why does not Browning wish to creep quietly past the "Arch Fear"?
6. Just how does he regard death?
7. Explain fully the meaning of the last two lines.

Epilogue to "Asolando"

The last collection of poems that Browning wrote — *Asolando* — was published in London on the day of his death at Venice, December 12, 1889. The volume had been prepared in Asolo. The title comes from the Italian verb *asolare*, which means "to amuse one's self at random." This poem, which is generally published at the close of all editions of the poet's works, was the last of the collection. It is his final expression of a belief in a future life of hopeful activity. To the end he

believed in the doctrine he had so vigorously taught throughout his long life. While he was reading over the proof sheets of the poem, he said of the third stanza: "It almost looks like bragging to say this and as if I ought to cancel it; but it's the simple truth; and as it's true, it shall stand." This poem was Browning's last message to the world.

As the poem opens, Browning imagines himself as lying dead, and his loved ones, waking from their sleep in the middle of the night think of him "imprisoned" by death and pity him.

EPILOGUE TO "ASOLANDO"

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where — by death, fools think, imprisoned —
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
— Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
— Being — who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,

Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong
would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,— fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

Questions for Class Study

1. What is the poet's answer to their pitying him in the second stanza?
2. What consolation does he give concerning death in the third stanza?
3. What philosophy of life is revealed by this stanza?
4. How does Browning advise us to face the unseen?
5. According to this poem, what is Browning's thought as to the relationship between life and death?

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